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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["SHALL I TELL YOU MORE, OR ARE YOU SATISFIED?" SHE ASKED, ENJOYING HIS CONFUSION.]

THE MISTRESS OF LYNWOOD.

CHAPTER XX.

NATHALIE, as in duty bound, did her best to entertain her lover by taking him about, and showing him the country, as well as introducing him to her friends, who gave dinners and parties in honour of the engagement; which the gentleman's great wealth rendered popular.

People said Miss Egerton might have done better in point of family, but she could hardly have expected a richer *parti*; and, after all, money was the great thing nowadays, and so she had shown wisdom in her choice.

Neither was Mr. Farquhar disliked personally. He was master of a certain charm of manner when he chose to exert it, and he assuredly did his best to make himself agreeable to the friends of his future wife.

With Lionel alone he did not get on as well as he could have wished; there seemed to be

certain chords in the nature of each that jarred against the other; and after one or two attempts at intimacy, which were futile, they mutually gave up the endeavour to be friends, and contented themselves with a sort of neutrality, which constituted little more than mere acquaintanceship.

"I fancy I have shown you all the places of interest in the neighbourhood," said Nathalie, one morning at breakfast, to Mr. Farquhar; "there are not very many, and it doesn't take long to get through them."

Lionel looked up from the paper he was reading, and joined in the conversation.

"Have you been to the Dene Woods yet?" he asked.

"No; I had forgotten them."

"Where are the Dene Woods?" inquired Farquhar, who, as a matter of fact, knew their site as well as those he questioned, for he was a thorough man of business, and had made himself perfectly acquainted with the King's Dene estates before he advanced any money on them. Ignorance, however, suited the rôle he was playing, and so he assumed it.

"They are some very pretty woods, sloping down to the river, and about two miles from here—midway between this house and Lynwood Hall," answered Nathalie. "We might organise a picnic, and go there to-morrow. Would you care for it?" she added, to the banker.

"Need you ask such a question? I shall be delighted, of course."

"Whom else can I ask to join us?" mused Nathalie. "As it is an impromptu affair we can only invite intimate friends."

"The Lynwoods?" suggested Lionel.

"Would not Lady Lynwood find it dull?"

"Well, I don't know; but she said the other day that she should like a walk in the woods, and she is certainly not a woman who is always craving for excitement."

"Then she shall come," returned Nathalie, with a smile. "I'll write to her this morning, and send the note over to the Hall at once."

"I can take it if you like," observed her brother, carelessly. "I shall be riding past."

So it was settled, and Adrienne at once ac-

cepted the invitation, and easily persuaded her husband and Otho to join the party.

Accordingly, the next day they all assembled at the rendezvous, and then began walking through the woods towards the spot that had been selected for having luncheon.

There were two other members of the party—the Misses Lindsay, daughters of a neighbouring squire, and friends of Nathalie's, whom she had asked the preceding evening, and when the party scattered these two were walking with Otho and Sir Ralph, while Adrienne and Lionel were in front, and Nathalie and Farquhar behind.

"I suppose we must be kind to the lovers, and leave them to the enjoyment of each other's society," observed Otho, with a slightly sneering smile that the baronet felt inclined to resent.

The words might certainly only point to Nathalie and her fiancé, but his glance seemed to include the other two as well.

Sir Ralph, however, took no notice of the remark, but went on talking to Euphemia Lindsay, while the officer had to devote himself to her sister, a task which, as she was a very pretty girl, he had no reason to object to. Nevertheless, it did not prevent his attention from wandering to the pair in front.

It was a lovely day—the very perfection of a day for a picnic. There were no clouds on the sky, save for a few little foamy patches, that looked like sea-spray raked out, and lightly piled on the azure—too delicate even to shadow its brightness. The air was full of a mellow softness, scented with the balmy odours of many wild flowers, and, from the shady coverts of the trees, birds were singing as blithely as if it were early springtime again, and they wanted to join in a psalm of gladness at the approach of summer. Underfoot the moss formed a carpet, soft and thick as velvet pile, and so elastic that it sprang up after each footprint.

"It is not always one is so lucky in these impromptu excursions as regards the weather," observed Lionel, looking at his companion, who, in a cream muslin dress and big hat, was lovely as a dream.

"No, indeed. I remember a picnic we had at Brussels once, and which we had looked forward to for weeks, and when the day came it poured with rain; and so, after starting, we all came back, drenched to the skin, and very miserable and disappointed."

Lionel smiled; he liked hearing her speak of her school-days and their experiences, for it almost seemed to him that through his Brussels adventure, when they had first met, he had a sort of share in them.

"I love the woods," Adrienne went on, after a slight pause; "it seems to me that I should never be tired of watching the sunlight playing on the leaves, or hearing the doves cooing to each other, and the birds singing, and the branches rustling together with that little mysterious murmur which always makes me think they have a language of their own, and are talking to each other."

"You were evidently intended for a country life, not a town one."

"Oh! yes; the smoke and din of a great city would madden me. It must be true that 'God made the country, and man made the town.' On such a day as this one forgets one's troubles, and thinks only of the pleasures of life."

"But surely you have no troubles?"

Her fair brow clouded.

"I don't know. Sometimes I feel vaguely dissatisfied, and think I have, but that must be because I am ungrateful and discontented. At all events, I will have no troubles to-day," she added, with a buoyant smile, lifting her clear eyes to meet his; "I am determined to enjoy myself to the utmost, and forget there are such things as rainy skies and sunless air. I will be like a butterfly, and live only in the present. Hark!" she exclaimed, suddenly, and stopping with uplifted finger; "is not that a real burst of joy?"

It was a lark, far up in the blue air above,

flinging down his keen ecstasy of music, as if the beautiful earth and glorious sunlight were made for him alone, and he was revelling in it. When the song stopped, Adrienne drew a deep inspiration.

"Were you thinking of Shelley's words?" asked Lionel, and, almost under his breath, he repeated them,—

"Hail 'o thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart,
In profane strains of unremembered art."

"The words are well-nigh as musical as the bird's notes," observed the girl as he finished the poem; and then, in a lower voice, she added, "I wonder if it is true that,—

"We look before and after,
And sigh for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some care is fraught,
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

"I suppose there really is a poetry in sadness that there is not in joy," answered Lionel. "If Romeo and Juliet had married, and settled down into respectable, commonplace life, Shakespeare would never have written of them, and the sweetest love-story the world has ever known would have been untold. Their troubles and their tragic ending immortalised them, more even than did their romantic meeting and passionate devotion to each other."

"Still, it was worth living to love like that," murmured Adrienne, clasping her hands together, and speaking less to him than to herself.

"Yes," said Egerton, emphatically; "they had the best—the very essence of life; and if Fate used them hardly in decreasing their early death, she had compensated them beforehand by letting them drink delight's purest elixir to the very bottom of the cup—but they were happy, inasmuch as they had not had time to taste the dregs of the wine!"

Luncheon was spread in a cleared space, and, as they were sitting down, Miss Lindsay said,—

"I am rather tired; are not you, Lady Lynwood?"

"Oh, no! not at all. I feel quite as fresh as if I had not walked half-a-mile."

"Really! And yet we have come a good way."

"It did not seem so," returned Adrienne, innocently.

"Perhaps the time passed quickly because it passed pleasantly," said Miss Lindsay, with a tinge of spite in her voice, for she resented Lionel Egerton devoting himself to a married woman while there were single ones present.

"It usually does," answered the girl, tranquilly, and entirely unconscious of the innuendo.

"Mr. Egerton seemed to be keeping up a quite absorbing conversation with you," put in Otho, twisting his moustache, and laughing.

"We are never at a loss for interesting topics," she replied, smiling brightly; and Sir Ralph, who had been listening to what was said, put an end to the subject by proposing no time should be lost in commencing luncheon.

The meal was not quite so bright and merry as picnic luncheons generally are; a sort of cloud seemed to have fallen on everyone except Otho, who was even gayier than usual. Nathalie could not fail to read certain memories that King's Dene Wood awakened, of an afternoon spent there with Hugh Cleveland; and although she tried to hide her preoccupation from Farquhar, she was not altogether successful, for he was very sharp-sighted where his own affairs were concerned, and inclined to be suspicious as well.

When they got up, the party did not divide as before; for Adrienne, who fancied her husband was rather quiet, and that there might be something the matter with him, made

point of remaining at his side; and as Farquhar and Otho were talking to the two Lindsay girls Nathalie found herself in front with her brother.

Presently they both paused at the sight of a thin column of smoke, which lost itself in the trees, a little distance away, and evidently proceeded from a fire on the ground.

"Gipsies, I expect," observed Lionel.

Euphemia Lindsay, who had come up with Otho, repeated the word in delight.

"Do you think it really does mean gipsies?" she asked, trying to peer through the bushes.

"Probably. I know they come here sometimes, although I was not aware there were any in the wood now."

"Then perhaps we can have our fortunes told?"

"I should think there could be no doubt about that," said Otho, "provided, of course, we can find the necessary amount of silver for crowning the palm—the more silver, you know, the better the fortune."

The young lady looked disappointed.

"Ah! I thought they might be real gipsies."

"And what of that? Did you imagine the genuine article would be less mercenary than the *so-disant* ones? Quite a mistake, I assure you. Money is money all the world over, and is certainly the most potent power with us all."

He looked up as he uttered the last words, and caught Lionel's eyes fixed upon him in a keen scrutiny that he neither liked nor understood.

"At any rate, we will investigate," he said, hastily, and led the way in the direction of the smoke, followed by the rest of the party.

The scene that met their gaze when they came to a little opening in the trees was not destitute of the picturesque element. In the background stood a rude tent, one fold of which was looped back, and just in front of it, between it and the fire, an old woman was seated, whose features were of the true Egyptian cast. She was decently attired, and had a handkerchief of gaudy colours bound round her head; from beneath it straggled a few locks of white hair, that contrasted strangely with her brown complexion and the exceeding brightness of a pair of piercingly black eyes, which scanned her visitors' faces in turn, and then came back to rest on Egerton.

She looked at him with such intentness that he constituted himself spokesman, and addressed her.

"Can you tell any of us our fortunes?" he asked, half jestingly, as he advanced further into the open.

She had been smoking a short pipe, and this she took from her mouth and emptied of its contents before she answered.

"I could tell ye your fortunes, but whether you would all care to know them is another matter, Mr. Lionel Egerton," she returned, deliberately.

CHAPTER XXI.

LIONEL was considerably taken aback by the gipsy's answer, and the peculiarly intent way she regarded him.

"How did you know my name?" he asked, in surprise.

She laughed shortly.

"That is no great cause for wonderment," she said; "you carry your lineage written on your face."

Egerton's astonishment increased. Her language was very different from what he had expected to hear, and she spoke with a certain lofty indifference that may have been assumed for the purpose of effect, but was decidedly impressive.

"It is Rebecca, the gipsy, who was here so many years ago, and of whom my old nurse used to tell me such startling tales," whispered Nathalie; but, low as she spoke, the old woman seemed to have caught the import of her words.

"Yes, it is Rebecca. You have spoken truly," she said, as if in answer.

"Shall I ask her to tell your fortune?" said Otho to Euphemia Lindsay.

"No; not yet, at all events. She looks so weird that she has frightened me," replied the girl, who had certainly grown paler.

"Frightened by the looks of a gipsy!" laughed the officer. "You surprise me, Miss Lindsay. I thought you had more courage than to be taken in by the tricks of a charlatan."

"Well, if you are so brave yourself, have your own fortune told!" retorted the young lady, with some pique at his tone; and Otho accordingly stepped forward.

"Come, mother, let me cross your hand with silver, and then tell me the stars are propitious to my hopes!" he exclaimed, as he held out a florin.

The old woman looked at him earnestly.

"Perhaps it would be wiser on your part not to tempt me to disclose the secrets of the stars," she observed, significantly.

"I am more than willing that you should disclose all you know," he retorted, in a mocking tone, and with a slight laugh, as if to show his contempt at her assumption of a knowledge in which he had no faith.

Rebecca's lips curved in a half smile, as mocking as his own; and bending down till her lips were close to his ear, she whispered a few words that had a marvellous effect on him. His face grew ashen in its pallor, and he started as if something had stung him.

"Shall I tell you more, sir, or are you satisfied?" she asked, aloud, apparently enjoying his confusion.

"I have no wish to be imposed upon further," he answered, angrily, and flinging the piece of silver on the ground as he precipitately retired.

"After all, you haven't stood the ordeal so very bravely," maliciously whispered Euphemia Lindsay; but he was too deeply absorbed in thought to reply; indeed, it is doubtful whether he heard the words, so occupied was he with his own reflections.

"Who is to be the next?" said Sir Ralph, rather amused at his nephew's discomfiture.

Gilbert Farquhar stepped forward.

"I will volunteer. I have never had my fortune told in my life, and the novelty of the sensation increases its charm," he observed, holding out his hand.

The old woman looked him steadily in the face; then bent down, and carefully examined the lines on the left palm, muttering to herself, and shaking her head the while.

"Well," he said, at last, impatiently, "what do you see?"

"I see more of the past than the future," she replied, without raising her eyes.

"Does that mean that I shall not live so many years as I have lived already?"

She bowed her head in acquiescence.

"I see ability, and perseverance, and energy, but I see hardness, and cruelty, and oppression as well," she muttered; "a will that never faltered, a conscience that never revolted, passions that were never checked, a selfish heart that reeked little of the sufferings of others—these are what I see. Would you have me say more?"

Farquhar had coloured at these accusations, but he did not attempt to withdraw his hand.

"Go on. I presume what you have said may be supposed to refer to the past. Now tell me something of the future."

"The same strong will, the same undaunted courage, the same faithless resolution—and all leading to one black dead. I cannot say what it is, for I myself do not know; but blood will be spilt, and swift and sure the retribution that follows."

She dropped her hand, and waved aside the gold he had offered her.

"I may not take it—it would be the price of a life," she said, sternly; then, turning to Egerton, she added, "Come hither, Lionel Egerton, I have that to say which it behoves you to hear."

Involuntarily he obeyed, for there was a sovereign command in her tones that exacted respect.

"There is a curse on the Egertons, as there has been for the last two generations, and it is for you to avert the impending doom," she commenced, solemnly, and, raising her hand, as if to give additional emphasis to her words. "The bones of one of your ancestors lie in an unconsecrated grave, and until they are laid to rest in hallowed ground the curse cannot be stayed. When that has come to pass then shall the honour of the house be restored, and its tarnished glories shine forth as they did in the old days, before Cyrus Egerton had cast his baleful influence on his race."

It is impossible to describe the weird impressiveness of both voice and manner as she uttered these words; and, cynical as Lionel professed himself, it is useless to deny that they had a very startling effect upon him, while the others stood as if spell-bound.

"Do you mean to say, then, that I shall discover the whereabouts of Cyrus Egerton's body?" he asked, eagerly, while Nathalie bent forward in intense excitement to hear the answer.

"It is deputed to you to do it."

"And his wealth—what of that?"

"There are some secrets the stars refuse to unfold, and that is one."

"But can you tell me nothing about it—am I to have no clue?" he persisted.

She looked at him with a certain scorn.

"Do you think I can compel a knowledge—can alter the decision of the planets? Learn, then, their decrees are irrevocable, and I can only impart to you that which I know myself—and I have already done it."

"I will be content, and ask you no more," returned Lionel, but he did not offer her money—to have done so would have seemed to him an insult.

During this colloquy Nathalie had stood with clasped hands and eager eyes, almost bewildered by its strangeness, but deeply impressed with what she had heard. The sibyl's gaze fell upon her, and softened into more gentleness than it had hitherto evinced.

"As for you," she said, "a noble daughter of a noble race, I need not look at your hand, for your story is written in your eyes. There is sorrow, sorrow, sorrow! Sorrow in the past, sorrow in the present, sorrow in the future."

Poor Nathalie, highly excited by what had just transpired, covered her face with her hands and burst into tears; and Lionel, angry with himself that he had allowed her to remain a witness of such a scene; threw his arm round her waist and drew her forcibly outside the enclosure of trees that surrounded the gipsy tent, whither he was quickly followed by the others.

"Our fortune telling has been rather an unfortunate experiment," observed Sir Ralph Lynwood, who was the first to recover from the effects of Rebecca's words.

"It seems to me this gipsy is a bird of ill-omen for she has prophesied evil all round."

"Confounded old impostor!" muttered Otho.

"I should hardly call her that," said Lionel, gravely. "Crazed she may be, but I think she believes what she says."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Farquhar. "She has taken up a new line of charlatanism, if you will, but depend upon it it is only because she thinks it will pay her in the end."

"That can hardly be, for she refused your gold."

"A trick! These people are very cunning, and calculate a long way in advance; besides, this woman is evidently educated, and cleverer than even the generality of her tribe; no doubt she has established a reputation, and can afford to keep it up by declining fees now and again. Why, surely," added the banker, half-contemptuously, "you do not place any credence in what she said?"

Lionel did not reply, and Farquhar began to laugh.

"I really believe you think she is inspired!" he exclaimed.

"I must confess I am not so sceptical as you," admitted Lionel, candidly, "and the fact of her knowing my name took me by surprise at first."

"Let us go away from this dreadful place," exclaimed Adrienne, who was white as snow, and shivering from head to foot. "That terrible woman has frightened me by her menaces of future trouble—she had nothing but woe to foretell."

"At any rate, you are exempt," put in Otho.

"That was because she was too occupied to observe me, and I was careful to keep in the background. I was horribly afraid lest her glance should light upon me."

"She would not have prophesied harm for you—you, who are hedged in and protected on every side," he returned; but Adrienne was far from satisfied with this assurance, and hurried on until she had put a good distance between herself and Rebecca's tent.

"I wish we had never gone near the place," exclaimed Euphemia Lindsay; "I am sure what we have heard has taken all spirit of enjoyment from us."

This was true; for in spite of the efforts of Nathalie, who, as promoter of the party, thought it her duty to try and make it a merry one, and who did her best to forget the strange words she had just listened to, no one regained their former brightness, and by mutual consent they turned their steps homewards, while the afternoon sun was still shining brightly, and the tea the servants had prepared remained untasted.

"I'm afraid," said the young girl, mournfully, "my picnic has been a failure."

And, as a matter-of-fact, the others agreed with her.

CHAPTER XXII.

NATHALIE asked her friends to return to King's Dene with her, and spend the evening, but they all on various pretexts declined, so she and Lionel and Farquhar went back by themselves, and dined alone, for Mr. Egerton also excused himself from joining them.

The meal was a silent one. Even Farquhar, usually so talkative, seemed as little inclined for conversation as for eating.

"I believe we are all depressed by the events of the afternoon," exclaimed Nathalie, with a forced laugh, and breaking a long pause, "I shall certainly attempt no more picnics."

"The picnic would have been a success but for the fortune-teller," answered her betrothed, pulling his moustache thoughtfully, and glancing across at Lionel, who seemed lost in meditation. "I believe your brother is still revolving her prediction."

"As a matter-of-fact, you are right," replied Egerton, rousing himself with an effort.

"And you are inclined to believe it?"

"I would hardly go as far as that," he said, evasively.

"At all events, you don't regard the woman as a charlatan?" added Farquhar, with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice.

"No, I certainly do not. I should be much more inclined to say she was a visionary, who believed in her own powers of second sight."

"Rubbish!" exclaimed the banker, with more force than elegance. "It would take a great deal to convince me of the existence of a sixth sense; I believe in nothing that cannot be reduced to the level of common sense."

"Is not that taking rather a narrow view of life and its possibilities?" put in Nathalie.

"It is a practical view, at all events, and one that answers best in business," smiling grimly.

"It is a good thing that I am so sceptical, otherwise the old woman's prophecy concerning myself might occasion me considerable uneasiness; as it is, I can afford to laugh at it."

Lionel rose rather abruptly and went out on the terrace, where he commenced pacing backwards and forwards, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes fixed on the ground.

As a rule he was neither credulous nor superstitious, and he himself was surprised at the hold the gipsy's words had taken on his imagination. Try as he would he could not shake off the impression of the afternoon's events, and the thought would come,—

"Is there any truth in her assertion? does Cyrus Egerton still lie unburied, and is his vast wealth concealed with him?"

Although the young man was not fully aware of the pecuniary difficulties in which his father was involved—for Mr. Egerton had sedulously avoided alluding to money matters before him, and had even evaded his direct questions—he was quite sharp-sighted enough to see that money was a very scarce commodity at King's Dene, and, moreover, he knew the estates were mortgaged.

Suppose he really found the buried treasure, and could devote it to the restoration of the fallen fortunes of his family, what a grand thing it would be!

And yet, even as the thought flashed across his mind, an expression of bitterness came in his eyes.

"What does it matter?" he muttered to himself. "I am the last of my line, and the chances are ten to one the name will die out with me, for I certainly feel no inclination to marry."

It did not strike him that it was only lately, such a dislike to matrimony had taken possession of him. Before his return home, although he had had no definite plans, it had seemed quite a matter of course that he should, in time, take to himself a wife; indeed, he would have said it was a duty he owed to his name to do so, almost as great an one as if he had been heir to the throne, and the country looked to him for its future king.

"Still," he added, continuing his reverie, "I should like to free my father from the embarrassments in which, I feel pretty sure, he is involved. I should like to banish that anxious look from his eyes, and take him away from those account-books that he seems to be everlastingly studying; and this, the discovery of that hidden mine of wealth, would enable me to do. But, then, there is the question of how to begin the task."

He pondered some time, and finally went to the library, a lofty, old room, that was grand by reason of its vast proportions, its oak wainscoting, its elaborate carving; and yet so very, very shabby as to carpet, chairs, and other furniture, that had seen the wear-and-tear of many long years.

In one corner stood a huge, old chest, and to this Lionel went, with the result of finding it locked. He tried various keys of his own, but none fitted.

So, after a few vain attempts, he went to his father's study. Mr. Egerton was there, poring, as usual, over his rent-books, and he looked somewhat annoyed at being disturbed.

"What is it?" he asked, taking it for granted his son had some specific object in seeking him.

Lionel answered his question by another,—

"Why did you not join us at dinner?"

"Because I was busy."

"Over your books, I presume?"

Mr. Egerton pushed the white hair-back from his brow rather wearily.

"Yes; over my books."

"Do you not think you spend too much time studying them?" pursued Lionel, the respect in his voice tinged with reproach. "Surely it has not taken you all this while to calculate your rents, and arrive at a due estimate of your property?"

"You do not understand; it is not that which occupies me," answered the Squire, his eyes lighting up with unusual animation. "I am not calculating my present revenues, but what they will be in the future, when the mortgages are paid off, and—"

He stopped himself abruptly, and seemed half afraid he had betrayed too much.

"Father!" exclaimed the young man impulsively, "why will you not take me into your confidence with regard to your difficul-

ties? Perhaps, nay, I am sure, I could help you."

"Difficulties!" repeated his father, knitting his brows. "Who told you I was in difficulties?"

"I did not require to be told; instinct alone would be sufficient to inform me, to say nothing of your own altered appearance. You are growing prematurely old and grey through anxiety, which you will not allow me to lessen by sharing. Indeed," continued the young man, gravely, "I think it is your duty to enlighten me with regard to your position."

"You mistake, Lionel, indeed, you mistake!" exclaimed his father, eagerly, while his pale face flushed a deep red. "I have your interests so deeply at heart that they are never absent from my thoughts, as you will see by-and-by, when I can explain everything to you. At present I may only say that I have discovered a means of partly freeing the estates from their liabilities, and my time is now taken up in calculating the best methods of employing the rent so as to entirely free them by the time they descend to you."

Lionel saw that further arguments would be useless, so he changed the subject by asking for the key of the muniment chest.

Mr. Egerton opened his eyes in astonishment at the request.

"What do you want it for?"

"I am going to look through the ancient deeds which I believe the chest contains."

"But they are centuries old, and will prove of no interest to you now."

"I am willing to risk that, and as for their being old—why so much the better. I suppose most of them relate to this house, and the estates?"

"Yes, I believe so, or rather it would be more correct to say they relate to King's Dene when it was still a monastery, and before the Abbey became a ruin. I suppose you are aware that at the Reformation the revenues were confiscated, and the Abbey itself demolished?"

"Yes, but this house is part of the original monastery, is it not?"

"I believe so."

"The foundations are the same?"

"Oh, yes—I should say the very walls were as well. Of course the interior has been altered and added to. No doubt you will find an account of it in the documents in the chest."

Lionel took the key, and returned to the library, where he began an assiduous search amongst the musty old deeds that had been preserved through the lapse of centuries, and now remained as witness to the industry of bygone generations of monks, whose leisure had been employed in copying them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER Lionel left them, Nathalie and Farquhar sat for some little time trifling over the dessert, and then the latter said,—

"Let us go into the grounds, the night is fine, and I don't think there is any danger of your catching cold."

The girl obediently rose, and throwing a light shawl over her shoulders, led the way to the terrace, at the end of which Lionel might be perceived.

"Your brother seems wrapped in meditation," observed Farquhar, casting a glance in his direction, as he lighted a cigar. "We won't disturb him, for he would be, doubtless, as averse to our society at the present moment as I, for my part, should be to his. We will walk as far as the plantation."

Their way lay through the shrubbery, at the end of which a little gate gave access to the plantation, now in semi-obscure by reason of its dense foliage, and the waning evening light.

About half-way through a little stream meandered along, and across this a light rustic bridge had been thrown. Farquhar came to a pause when they reached the bridge, and leaned against the woodwork.

"We need not go farther—that is to say, unless you wish to prolong your walk," he observed.

"On the contrary, I shall be glad of a rest," returned Nathalie, breaking off a spray of bramble, and fingering the leaves in an absent manner.

For some little time neither spoke. Farquhar seemed intent on his cigar, while the girl's eyes were fixed on the sunset sky, glimpses of which were visible through the boughs. Long lines of level rays came slanting between the boles of the trees, and lay in a faint yellow radiance on the moss and greenery with which the miniature forest was carpeted. It was very still here—no sound to break the silence save the sweet cadences of a thrush's song, or now and again the prolonged note of a black-bird's whistle, and in the distance the low murmur of falling water.

Farquhar finished his cigar, and let the end fall in the stream, where it made a little spluttering hiss before it was finally extinguished; then he turned to Nathalie, and after a moment's hesitation, threw his arm round her waist, and bent down and kissed her.

The girl submitted without a word—this was part of her sacrifice, she reminded herself, and he had a right to her caresses; but, strive as she might, she could not prevent a slight thrill of repulsion as his lips touched hers. Keen-sighted in this, as in other things, he observed it, but he did not withdraw his arm.

"What!" he exclaimed, reproachfully, "are my kisses still so distasteful to you?"

"I never gave you reason to suppose they would be otherwise," she returned, coldly.

"No, but there is such a thing as hope, which, you will remember, springs eternal in the human breast; and I fancied that, as the days went by, they would find you, or rather, leave you less hard-hearted."

"I am not given to change—I believe my nature is a very constant one."

"All the better, so that it is constant to me!" he returned, lightly. "You see I do not despair even yet. If you are hard I am sanguine, and I have sworn to make you love me, even if I have to wait long years in order to compass my wishes. It is something to have the right to kiss you, my peerless Nathalie," he added, and again pressed his lips to her brow.

At the same moment a rustling in the bushes made them both start, and look round. There was no one visible, but the trees grew so closely together just here, and there was such a thick growth of underwood, that half-a-dozen people might have been in ambush within as many yards. Farquhar started uneasily, and glanced round.

"Did you hear a noise?" he asked.

"Yes, I fancied I heard a sort of half-stifled cry, and then a movement of the branches, but it may have been nothing more than a stoat, or some other animal."

The banker listened intently, but all was still; even the birds had ceased singing, and crept into their nests for the night, and the yellow light in the west had faded to a few splashes of dull amber.

"Is this place infested by poachers?" he inquired.

"One can hardly say it is infested, for it is so near the house that whoever ventures here runs a double risk of detection," replied Nathalie, composedly; "still I believe poachers do come occasionally, for the place is full of rabbits."

Whether Farquhar's nerves were a little upset by Rebecca's prediction cannot be said, but he certainly appeared somewhat ill at ease, and drawing Nathalie's arm through his retraced his steps rather hurriedly towards the house. As they turned a sharp curve in the shrubbery they overtook a dark figure, apparently hurrying in the same direction.

"Who is that?" inquired Farquhar.

Nathalie strained her eyes—for the twilight

had deepened so rapidly as to render all objects more or less indistinct—and recognised the dress in front.

"It is my maid, Warren," she answered; "she is rather a peculiar woman, and seems to have a fancy for wandering about in the dusk."

"Perhaps it was she who was in the plantation?"

"Not at all improbable."

"Why should she watch us?" he asked suspiciously.

Nathalie laughed.

"I do not in the least suppose she was watching us. If it were she, she had probably gone for a little walk, knowing I should not be likely to want her just at this time, and directly she saw us she made all haste to get out of our way—as she is doing now."

Farquhar appeared satisfied with the explanation, but evinced no desire to linger in the open air, for he challenged his fiancée to a game of chess, and they both entered the drawing-room, where coffee had been brought up, and were presently deeply absorbed in the mimic warfare.

When Nathalie was preparing for bed it struck her to ask her maid—who was brushing out the shining masses of her luxuriant hair before fastening them up for the night—whether she had been in the wood that evening.

"No, miss," replied Warren, who was a quiet, pale faced woman, with hair that seemed prematurely grey. "I went into the shrubbery and might have gone as far as the plantation, only I heard your voice, and thought that as you were coming home you might want me, so I hurried back."

Her mistress made no remark, but went on with the book she was reading, and after the hair-dressing operations were completed, Warren said with some little hesitation,—

"I was going to ask a favour of you miss."

"Pray ask it," returned Nathalie, kindly, turning down the page, and raising her eyes from her book.

"I was wondering whether you would object to my wearing spectacles, miss. My eyes were never very strong, but lately they have given me a good deal of trouble, and when I went to W— yesterday, I called on a doctor, and he said the only thing I could do would be to wear blue glasses for awhile."

"Wear them by all means—but have you any?" asked Nathalie, observing that the woman's eyes really looked very red and inflamed.

"Oh yes, miss—the doctor gave me these," pulling a case from her pocket, and putting on the spectacles, which effected such a metamorphosis in her appearance that her mistress could not forbear a smile.

"They make you look quite different!" she remarked; "your friends would hardly know you unless they had seen you in them previously."

"Wouldn't they, miss?" a peculiar smile flitting across her mouth. "Well, that is of very little consequence, for I have no friends about here."

"The change is not a becoming one," added the young girl candidly, "you look ever so much older."

"Do I, miss?" indifferently.

"By-the-by," said Nathalie, yielding to a sudden—and, for her, very unusual—"impulse of curiosity, "how old are you, Warren?"

The woman hesitated for a moment, and her mistress smiled to herself at this evidence of the weakness of her sex.

"I am thirty-three, miss," she replied, at length.

"Thirty-three! I should not have judged you so much by four years—that is to say, when you have no spectacles on."

Warren did not answer, but respectfully inquired if she could do anything else for Miss Egerton, and on receiving a negative reply, retired, wishing her mistress "good-night."

Nathalie was rather inclined to like her; she as always quiet, and went about her work

very deftly—a great contrast to the maid whose place she took, and who had been apparently under the impression that one of her chief duties was to supply her mistress with the gossip of the servants' hall—a practice Nathalie peremptorily put an end to by dismissing her.

As a rule, the young girl sat up into the small hours reading, but to-night she felt no inclination to do so—her own life seemed so vivid, and full of action and anxiety that she had no sympathy to spare for the sorrows of novelists' heroines. Brave as she was, and heroically as she bore the burden she had voluntarily assumed, there were times when it pressed upon her so heavily that she could have cried aloud in the anguish of repressed love, and the humiliation of her position as the betrothed bride of a man she disliked, and to-night the memory of Hugh Cleveland was very present to her.

She wondered where he was, what he was doing, whether his thoughts strayed to her as often as hers did to him, and whether they had grown more kindly since that last farewell.

"I hope not—oh, I hope not!" she exclaimed, half audibly. "The harsher his judgment the less he will be inclined to regret me, and the sooner I shall fade from his memory!"

And yet, it is very much to be doubted whether, in this utterance, she was not deceiving herself, for at the thought of the possibility of Hugh consoling himself with another woman, her blood ran cold, her heart almost stopped beating, and she threw out her hands in a gesture of most pitiful entreaty, as if she were throwing something repulsive from her.

The human heart is very complex, and who shall fathom its manifold mysteries?

Her reverie was interrupted by the clock on the mantelpiece which struck the hour in little silvery chimes—one o'clock. She had no idea it had grown so late, and at the same moment she became aware she was very cold, for she had nothing on her but her dressing-gown, and the night air was chillily penetrating.

Shivering, she put out the light and crept into bed, and, in spite of her agitated state of mind, soon fell into a light slumber.

How long it lasted she could not afterwards tell, but she awoke quite suddenly, and with a curiously vivid sensation of someone standing by her side and watching her.

The idea was so strong that it never for a moment occurred to her to attribute it to fancy; but an overwhelming terror—all the more overwhelming because, as a rule, she was extremely courageous—took possession of her, and rendered her simply incapable of movement. She lay perfectly still, her heart beating in thick, suffocating throbs, her tongue literally cleaving to the roof of her mouth—her eyesight the only sense that seemed left to her, except hearing, which was strained to its utmost tension.

The night was rather dark, and her curtains were drawn, so that even the faint light that came from the stars could not penetrate into the room, which seemed full of dense, dusky shadows; nevertheless, after a few seconds, a shadow, deeper and darker than the rest, seemed to detach itself, and take the shape of a human form, standing close beside the head of the bed—but whether it belonged to man or woman it would have been quite impossible to say.

The same instant Nathalie found this impression on her consciousness there was a movement of the bed curtains, and the spell under which the girl had hitherto laboured was broken. A dark arm was outstretched above her, but, quick as lightning, she sprang up in bed and put out her hand, uttering at the same time a loud and piercing shriek, for her hand came in contact with the icy chill of steel, and a gush of blood, flowing from her wrist, told her she had been wounded.

Again she screamed for help, and then, with a supreme effort at self-command, groped

about for matches, and had just succeeded in lighting a candle, when the door was burst open, and Lionel rushed into the room—he slept in the same passage, and had been the first to hear her cries.

"Good heavens, Nathalie! What is the matter?" he exclaimed, his alarm naturally increased tenfold by the sight of her white face and bleeding wrist. "You are wounded!"

"Yes, but very slightly," she answered, with a pallid smile, her courage returning.

Lionel bent down and examined the wound, which, as she said, was very slight. The cut was a clean one, and seemed to have been inflicted with a knife, or some equally sharp instrument, which had not penetrated far beneath the skin.

As briefly and clearly as she could, Nathalie told her brother what had happened, and he at once searched the room, to see if he could find traces of her assailant. His efforts were in vain; not an article of jewellery had been touched, not a thing was disarranged, and the fastenings on doors and windows were secure.

By this time, Farquhar, the butler, and some other servants had arrived on the scene, and Nathalie had put on dressing-gown and slippers, and was assisting Lionel in his search.

The banker, when he learned what had happened, was considerably agitated, and his fiancée could not help being a little moved by his deep thankfulness at her escape, and his anxiety on her behalf.

A thorough search all through the house was at once instituted, but with a fruitless result; for although every hole and corner was looked into, and every outlet guarded lest the would-be assassin should escape, nothing was discovered, and at last it was given up as useless.

"If it were not for that cut I should think you had been dreaming," said Lionel.

Nathalie shook her head.

"No dream could ever have been half as vivid as my sensations."

"Oh, of course it is impossible to doubt that someone was in your room, but who it was and how he got there is a mystery."

"A mystery I would give five thousand pounds to fathom!" added Farquhar, impulsively. "Indeed, I shall offer that sum as a reward for information that will lead to the wretch's apprehension!"

Lionel pondered a few minutes, then decided to have all the servants in the library, and question them—a resolve he put in immediate execution.

He gained nothing by it, however, for their replies to his inquiries were perfectly open and straightforward; indeed, all had the same declaration, namely, that they had been asleep during the time of the occurrence, and there was nothing in the manner of any of them to induce him to doubt their word; on the contrary, each expressed the utmost indignation against the attempt made on their young mistress, whom they all liked and admired.

Finally, Lionel dismissed them, having learned nothing, and repeating his former declaration that the whole affair was wrapped in a mysterious darkness, which it seemed impossible to lessen.

The housekeeper alone had a suggestion to offer, and she did it with fear and trembling when she and her young master were alone.

"It was nothing natural that was in Miss Nathalie's room, Mr. Lionel, you take my word for it!" she exclaimed, impressively. "This house is haunted if ever house was, and it is your great Uncle Cyrus's spirit that can't rest, though the breath's gone out of his wicked old body!"

Lionel started violently. At any other time he would have laughed and pooh-poohed the words, might even have been angry with the housekeeper, although she had been in his father's family over forty years, and was accorded the privileges of an old and trusted servant; but now he did not laugh, although he rebuked her, and when she had left the

room a curious expression of musing came in his eyes.

"Are there such things as ghosts?" he muttered to himself. "Verily, this is a strange world, and there are, indeed, more things in Heaven and earth than our philosophy dreams of!"

(To be continued.)

SAVED BY LOVE.

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CHAPTER IV.

"LADY CROYLAND!" echoes Warren's mother, with a great burst of astonishment that speaks in her eyes, and every lineament of her well-cut, aristocratic features.

"Yes, Lord Croyland's wife!" says Esme, with the same threat of defiance in her voice, but without one sign of feeling abashed at her detection.

She has passed the rubicon, and there is no help for it but to brave the matter out, especially as her rights as a wife cannot be impugned.

Lady Croyland stands at the door looking at this girlish vision of dark beauty, heightened tenfold by the flashing diamonds, hardly knowing whether she is awake or dreaming.

"Yes, I am your son's wife, for I presume you are his mother?" says Esme, in such a matter-of-fact tone that the listener's mind is disabused of any element of the supernatural.

"Whoever you are, you shall not leave this room until you account to me for this intrusion, and for the theft of those jewels."

While speaking she looks the door and advances resolutely towards Esme, into whose tawny eyes there leaps angry fire, as if she would like to spring at her throat, panther-like, and end the matter in a death-struggle.

But prudence comes to the girl's aid, as, like an inspiration, there flashes through her mind Warren's words that ruin would overtake him if his mother discovered his deceit.

And here was she openly avowing the fact to the arbiter of their destinies.

"Surely, Lady Croyland, there is no harm in a wife being where her husband has made his home for years?"

"But the diamonds; did he give them to you?" she asks sternly, for to her mind Warren's breach of the trust imposed in him as the future head of the house of Croyland was even worse than his alleged secret marriage.

"No, my husband did not."

"You talk glibly of husbands," her ladyship sneers, "but let that be enquired into hereafter. I am sufficient woman of the world to know that there are wives and wives."

The hot blood of rage surges into the girl's face as she listens to this insult; but beyond the nervous clenching of her hands she does not make any display of the emotions that are raging within her like volcanic fires.

"Now, the truth, if you value my clemency," continues her ladyship, assuming a magisterial air that further provokes Esme's ire, and is working her up to a pitch of fury.

"Your clemency!" she almost hisses, the conflict of passions rendering her voice sibilant.

"Yes, for you stand convicted of the unlawful possession of the Croyland diamonds. Who gave them to you? Speak before I ring for my servants to call in the police."

"You would dare to place such an indignity upon your son's wife?"

"I do not acknowledge any such relationship," is the haughty rejoinder. "Will you confess, or must I put the law in force against you?"

"I refuse to incriminate myself or others," says Esme, proudly. "Call in the police, and to-morrow the country will ring with the humiliation of the Croylands. If I stand in

the dock as a thief the disgrace will be yours as much as mine or my husband's. Here are the jewels, just as you left them, everyone intact."

This is turning the tables very cleverly upon the mistress of Croylands; and she is forced to admit the cogency of Esme's arguments, who, for one so young, is wonderfully calm and self-possessed under a most trying ordeal.

"You know the secret of that cabinet?" she says, feeling that she cannot again utter threats without loss of dignity.

"I refuse to answer. Here are the diamonds; replace them when I am gone, or do with them as you please. You may fume and rage as much as you like, but some day they will be mine, in spite of you, or fifty like you."

Lady Croyland pales to the very lips under this open defiance hurled at her by a stranger—an alien who, like a serpent, has crept into the family and wound her fatal coils round her only son, the sole hope of her house and declining years.

"Never! There is such a thing as the law," she retorts, in concentrated bitterness. "My son is not his own master yet, and this marriage, even should it have taken place, can and will be annulled."

"More threats, nothing but threats!" sneers Esme. "This is a nice welcome for a daughter. You could not be more spiteful even had I stolen these gems."

And as she speaks she takes them off in turn and flings them contemptuously on the carpet at her feet, where they lay, a glittering mass, full of mysterious gleaming fires.

"Now," she continues, with an air of bravado that quells Lady Croyland, to whom such a scene is a new revelation, "let me pass to my hair. I, the wife of your son, nobler by far than his mother, I am compelled to hide my head like a hunted animal, while you live in splendour—surrounded by servants and every luxury; and yet my only crime is that, loving your son, I consented to stultify myself, I who am Lady Croyland as much as you. Open that door. Do you hear, madam, or must I ring for the servants, and, telling them my true position, appeal to their help?"

"Shameless girl; have you no respect for a family that never yet has had a *mealliance* thrust upon it until now?"

"The shame is yours, madam!" Esme retorts hotly. "I have done no wrong that my spirit should be humbled into the very dust, crushed beneath your heel. You pride yourself on your birth and blue blood. I can show, perhaps, a line of ancestors far nobler than yours. Open that door, I command you."

And the beautiful Esme, a mere stripling, points imperiously to the door, giving back scorn for scorn, defiance for defiance.

"You must leave this house at once," says Lady Croyland, hotly.

"No, I shall not, neither will I remain in hiding. Here (thrusting her hand into her bosom and producing a paper) is my marriage certificate. I claim your hospitality until my husband's return."

"This house is mine," protests her ladyship.

"Yes, only yours till Lord Croyland can assert his rights. Listen to the tempest—how fiercely the wind howls, and the rain beats. You wish to drive me forth to die, to drown like your daughter did, in the swollen torrents!"

"Enough, forgive me. Even if you were a mere adventures, yet my precious child's fate would deter me from sending forth even a dog to meet her doom on such a night as this."

"Thank you for a favour wrung from you by fear, but such as it is I accept it till my husband can see me righted."

Without another word Lady Croyland unlocks the door and leads the way into her own boudoir, saying—

"For appearances' sake, let me beg of you not to be exacting to-night. If you need food I will serve you with my own hands rather than disturb the household."

"I would not touch food or drink given by

you—you who are so cruel to your son's wife, if I did not know my position is unassailable; you ask me to screen my presence here to-night! I wonder you care to ask me such a favour, I am to be sacrificed to every Croyland I come into contact with, to be pushed aside, hidden away lest the hem of my robe should contaminate them. No, I require nothing but rest; but, have a care, Lady Croyland, lest one day I leave your roof, shaking the dust off my feet as a testimony against you. You have commenced the war, but even you cannot see the finish."

"Mad, rash fool! oh Warren! I would rather see you lying dead at my feet than wedded to such a woman—a girl in years, but a woman in passions; no gentleness, nothing to relieve that dark brooding face of hers," moans her ladyship, when she finds herself alone, her only companion being the storm-flood, whose pealing notes of thunder and flashes of blue, steely lightning shake the castellated mansion, and light up with mysterious fires bush, tree, and swollen beck.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER day has passed at Croylands with out the ladies meeting, neither caring for a repetition of the stormy scenes of the previous night.

Lady Croyland is seated in her boudoir, waiting for the return of her son, to whom she has telegraphed.

The night is still, and flooded by the moon's silvery beams. All is calm and peaceful—trees hush a lullaby to the rippling torrent, and cast long, slanting shadows on the green sward; while the wind moans fitfully, as if the strife it had passed through had not yet subsided into perfect peace.

She looks at the clock, and murmurs—

"The last train will soon be in, and then if he comes what will happen? Will he renounce that insolent woman, and cleave to me—I who am a widow, and he my only son?"

There is a deep pathos in her voice, which only Heaven can hear or estimate at its true worth.

Within one solemn hour, a single revolution of those finger posts on the road to eternity—the hands of the clock—and perhaps ties sacred beyond conception would be snapped asunder like ropes of sand, and mother and son be parted to become strangers evermore.

So anxious is she that she cannot rest in the easy-chair, where hidden springs give repose; but rises and paces the room with a faraway, pleading look in her eyes, as if she would disarm the anger of fate.

Suddenly she halts before a group of family portraits, and tears well into her eyes as she murmurs—

"My husband gone, and my darling Violet, too; both of them passed through the party gates, leaving only Warren and I. Oh! how cruel he is to me, whose every thought, every throb and pulse of my heart has been his. She says he is her husband. She is beautiful, more lovely than almost any woman I have yet seen. Perhaps he will forsake me, his poor mother, and cleave to her. If he does"—here a lurid flash of anger leaps into her grey eyes—"I will never forgive him—no, never! He shall be an alien, an outcast from my home and heart."

What a conflict is going on in her breast, one that must ever leave its impress on those who pass through its scathing fires!

Already furrows lined her white brow, and crows' feet had stolen under her eyes, like barometers marking the storm that is raging in her nature, once so gentle and lovable, now on the balance, waiting for the scale to be turned for good or evil.

There is a step on the gravel-path. Warren Croyland hesitates to enter the home that has always been ready to welcome him with open arms.

"I wish I knew whether my fears are correct," he mutters. "The telegram only said 'Return at once.' Can Esme have foolishly

betrayed herself and our secrets? This suspense is torturing! Am I to lose my mother's love to-night, or will she forgive the one imprudent act of my life?"

Twice he essays to lift the heavy knocker, but it slips out of his nerveless grasp; but a third time he arouses the echoes of the hall, and once more, whether for weal or woe, he stands within the mysterious shadows of destiny, as typified by his wife's presence.

"Come in," says a trembling voice, and Warren, obeying, finds himself in his mother's room, looking as pale as if his features were chiselled out of marble.

Neither speak for quite two minutes; but merely look into each other's eyes as if to gauge the intensity of the impending struggle.

"Warren!"

"Mother!"

Again a silence, deep as that which hides man from the shores of eternity.

"Are you still a Croyland?" she asked, steadying her voice and gaze.

"Yes," he falters for too well now he gathers the reason of his sudden summons.

"You have no father, boy," and her voice sounds like the muffled tone of a funeral bell.

"No, mother?"

"Have I ever been cruel to you, Warren?"

"No, never."

"If you wanted anything in reason did I ever deny you?"

"You have been everything to me, dearest mother!"

"Have you nothing to confess?"

"Yes, one step taken without consulting you."

"Its nature?"

"Perhaps you already know?"

"Please tell me, yourself, Warren."

He hesitates, his mother's cold, almost freezing manner awes him beyond anything he had experienced.

"I am married!" he says at last, each word coming slowly from his bloodless lips.

"Married, boy?" and she starts an angry look at him.

"Yes mother, married."

"Where is your wife, Warren?"

"Here, in the home of my fathers, under the same roof with you."

Then, kneeling, he takes her hand, and says in thrilling tones of supplication,—

"Mother, do not look at me as if forgiveness could not pass your lips; Esme will be a daughter to you. She is beautiful, guileless, a mere girl, waiting to be taken into your heart and home. Let me bring her to you, and together we will plead for your blessing and forgiveness."

"I have seen her."

"You?"

"Yes, with the Croyland diamonds flashing on her alien breast, flaunting them in my very face, mocking me with defiance, and literally denying my right to this home."

"Esme did that—impossible?" he says, rising.

"There is a limit to insults, Warren. My word as a lady and your mother should not be challenged by you."

He is about to speak, but she waves him into silence, and continues,—

"Not if she were the daughter of a duke would I give up my position to her, or forgive the insults which I have had heaped upon me through your agency, your instrumentality; no viper could sting the bosom that warmed and sheltered it more than you have mine."

"I can only crave forgiveness. Perhaps you were angry with my wife?"

How she winces at the word "wife."

"Angry!" she retorts; "had I not cause and to spare, when I found her in possession of jewels that were sacred to me until I bequeathed them to another, and that other your wife of my choosing? But enough of this. You are still under my guardianship and owe me obedience. Will you give up that dark dangerous woman whose beauty is that of a

destroying angel, and appeal to the law to free you?"

"Never," he says calmly, but in accents of pride. "You ask me to betray the girl I made my wife, to cast her away out of my life as if she were something unfit to live. Oh! mother, do not let me think you so cruel as to visit my faults upon her innocent head."

"Do you refuse to obey me, Lord Croyland?" she asked, with set teeth and glittering eyes, in which the fever of anger burns all too brightly.

"Yes, mother, if Esme is not welcome here, neither am I."

"Then go, never again to return to my heart or home as long as she lives."

"This is bitterly cruel; I am your only son. Would you lose me and a daughter from mere pride?"

"Yes, go! My lawyer will communicate with you at any address you may give him. As you have made your bed, so you must lie on it."

Oh, the bitterness of these words! How they stung him into rebellion!

"Mother, pause—reflect—take time to consider!" he says, hoarsely.

"No, go! and take your wife with you! I will not put the curse of disobedience upon you, but in years to come you will suffer and pray in vain for forgiveness!"

"Can you be the mother at whose knee I knelt to hush my first prayer?" he asks himself more than her.

"Give up the girl, and I will be that mother to you again."

"Why, you would not treat a dog in the way you wish me to act towards a mere child who has placed herself under a husband's protection! She has learnt to love me, and I to love her—oh! so dearly! and yet, at your command, I am to cast her, like another Bazar, out into the wilderness because she loves me—a Croyland, who never yet was known to break his promise, much less an oath made at the altar. You, yourself, are a woman—cannot you find a single extenuating circumstance in her case? Must she be immolated on the shrine of pride—that Moloch which ruins the lives of thousands?"

She listens immovably to this heart-stirring appeal, and at its finish merely says,—

"Have you decided fully?"

"Yes; never to desert my wife! My duty and obedience as a son cannot make me act unjustly towards an innocent person. Esme will, no doubt, crave pardon if she has unwittingly given you offence. You and I are the only Croylands whom death has spared—let me still be your son, and Esme your daughter."

"I, too, have decided. There can be no compromise. Rash, infatuated boy, to betray the family secrets entrusted to you!"

"I own I was wrong in that; I cannot say more, mother. Are we to go—Esme and I?"

"Yes; I could not live under the same roof as her. To-morrow morning the carriage will be ready at any hour you like to name."

"We will go to-night—at once!" he says, with dignity. "Will you not say good-bye to her, mother?"

"No; I have no son, therefore no daughter! May you never know what it is to be thrust through and through by a child's ingratitude."

Warren goes out from her presence with bent head, but with a heart full of loving, tender devotion for his young wife—fully resolved not to desert her at the bidding of anybody.

"Esme, come!" he says, after she has flown to his arms and nestled against his heart. "Be brave; we have to leave Croylands at once."

"Oh, Warren! I have been very foolish! Can you ever forgive me?"

"Yes, fully—freely. Yours was the sin of thoughtlessness."

"Your mother—is she angry?"

"Yes, but that cannot separate us, Esme. It ought to draw us closer together."

"My noble Warren!" she sighs; and then,

gulping down her tears, she prepares to leave his home with him—perhaps for ever, and she wanted so to stay.

"Gone!" cries Warren's mother, as she hears the ponderous door close behind them, "Perhaps I have done wrong; but, no! it is too late to think of that. She would never rest until she usurped my place, as she has the love and fealty of my boy."

And into her face there creeps an almost ghastly pallor, as if she had passed through death's agony in those few brief, fleeting moments.

CHAPTER VI.

WINTER has passed, and the glad summer time has come, ushering in June roses and a wealth of floral treasures that spring like gems from the earth.

Both mother and son are more estranged than ever, especially since Esme has prevailed upon him to announce their marriage in the daily and society papers.

"Are you happy, Esme?" asks Lord Croyland, as he sits with her beneath the shade of lilacs and laburnums, in their pleasant garden on the banks of the Thames.

"Why are you always asking me that?" she says, with a pout.

"Because sometimes I catch a look of discontent on my darling's face. Is there anything I can get you to make you happier?"

Yes, there is something she covets—something that is laying next her heart for many a day and night—those matchless diamonds, which cost her husband as dear; but she has learned to veil her thoughts, and not to ask for impossible things; and says, in reply to his loving question,—

"No, Warren, except that we might be richer. When you come of age will you have plenty of money?"

And as if to coax the truth from him she caresses his curls, which meet in a cluster on his fine forehead.

"What a mercenary little wife it is!" he laughs. "Well, yes, we shall be three times as rich as we are now."

"And can we live at Croylands?"

"No, not till my mother's death."

"But it is yours, not hers, Warren. Why should she dispossess us?"

And into her dark fathomless eyes there springs the unholy fire of hate, twin-spirit to murder.

"Remember, she is my mother, and it would be a crime to thrust her forth from the home where she has reigned supreme for many a year."

"Yet she cast us out as if we were mice from the street, and since then all her efforts have been concentrated upon obtaining a nullification of our marriage. Would you like to be free?" she asks, as a kind of after-thought.

"No; I love my Esme more and more every day; without you life would be a blank. Be satisfied, I love you."

There is a pretty house, with the silvery Thames meandering past the trees that overhang its banks—a pleasant retreat—where life can be passed very enjoyably, if prosaically.

At Esme's request the garden is left a good deal to nature; everything grows in wild, wanton luxuriance. The convolvulus flings its tendrils into fantastic wreaths and wild festoons about the bushes of sweet brier.

This pleases her, because it is a type of her own nature—wild, fragrant, and impulsive; a child of the sunny South, to whom England is a place of fogs and rain.

"Why don't you take me abroad to dear Italy?" she asks, after she has recovered from her fit of the sulks, consequent upon his refusal to dispossess his mother.

"Because I dare not be absent from England for any length of time; besides Esme plays a part in my reluctance."

"I hate England and the English; they are

so slow, without any *chic*, especially the women."

"Come, sweetheart; you forget that you are English by your father's side. Please spare your countrywomen," and he pinches her downy cheek playfully.

"I don't care for them. They are famous, these English dames, for huge feet and hands, and babyish, simpering faces—there!"

He laughs at the spiteful but beautiful speaker, whose features are glowing with scorn and withering contempt.

"By Jove! you look like a Medusa; upon my word, you do."

"Some day I may prove one to my enemies in very deed," adding under her breath, "to your lady mother more especially."

Clasping her slim waist, and drawing her to him, he says, as he kisses her dewy lips,—

"I hope your poor hubby will not be included among the ranks of your enemies?"

"Sometimes, when you thwart me or put me on a lower pedestal than your mother I feel I could hate even you; indeed, there are times when I am afraid of myself; but I must run away now and dress for dinner, because I want you to take me to the opera."

"Poor darling!" he sighs. "I am sorry the matter is so hard upon you. I can bear it, because I deceived her; but you are innocent of everything, save of loving a great good-for-nothing scamp like me."

"Why does that face I saw in the picture gallery at Croyland haunt me? Surely death must have taken away the man resembling him so closely! Can it be that danger lurks unseen?" she thinks, as she finishes her toilette. "Lady Croyland would give much to be able to read one page in my life's history, but that she never will—I could die first."

Esme, it will be seen, has not developed very gentle traits since the night of her forced exodus from her husband's home.

"How lovely you look, Esme!" Warren exclaims, with admiration teeming in his expressive grey eyes.

"Do you really think so, Warren; or is it that fine feathers make fine birds?"

Although she jests at his compliment, yet there is a conscious smile upon her face that he has not flattered her one whit.

She looks radiant in a dress of white satin garnished with white ostrich feathers.

In the midst of this white magnificence, her great lustrous black eyes shine like dark stars; pearls are woven in her fairy-like satin slippers, and such is the splendour of her regal beauty that he almost fears someone or something will snatch such a prize away from him, and leave him poorer than the veriest beggar in love's kingdom.

After the opera, and just as Esme is alighting at her own door, a man with a dark passionate face, passes and looks at her fixedly, muttering,—

"Tracked!"

She almost falls in her terror, but her indomitable will keeps her from fainting.

Beyond a little hysterical cry she does not betray herself.

In an instant Warren's strong arm is around her, and he says,—

"My darling, what ails you?"

"Only a little faintness through the intense heat," she says, looking round for that face which has haunted her in dreams of late.

On finding herself alone in her dressing-room, she sits upon her couch and moans,—

"Has the grave given up its dead, that Oscar's face should look at me to-night? What am I to do? I am in his power; and Warren, loving me as he does, cannot help me."

Every knock that comes to the door makes her start, lest Oscar should be coming to torment her.

"I cannot bribe him with money to keep my secret," she thinks bitterly; "one of those

diamonds would save me, yet she hoards them up like a miser."

"I must run down to Maidstone to see my lawyer, he is very ill," says Warren, a few days after the visit to the opera. "Would you care to see the place, Esme?"

On any other occasion she would have said "yes" with alacrity.

But since she had seen the man she called Oscar, all colour had gone out of her life. Being brave, however, she wished to meet him and to put his motives to the test.

When she says "No thank you, dear Warren," she is influenced by the belief that Oscar is only waiting an opportunity to have an interview, when her husband is out of the way.

Nor is she mistaken. She is sitting in a little summer-house facing the river, when there is a splash of oars, and this is followed by a man's face peering over the wall.

"Esme, is it safe for me to enter?"

"No, I will come to you where you are," she says, and her voice appears strangely altered even to herself.

"How is it you are in England?" she asks, in a suppressed tone, as she leans upon the wall.

"You thought me dead; at least I was reported so."

"That need not be dwelt upon now; how came you to track me here?"

"At Monaco, where I was trying to wrest golden pieces from fate, I read of the marriage of Esme Dorman to Lord Croyland. Curiosity prompted me to come to England, and luckily I found that you and Lady Croyland were one and the same."

"You want money. I presume?"

"Yes, my old state of impecuniosity still pursues me. You are a great lady now, Esme. I don't want to interfere with your plans, but still a fellow must live, you know, and your secret is worth paying well to keep."

"I have no money."

"Nonsense; everybody knows that English noblemen are as rich as Jews," and he laughs at her sympathy in trying to delude him.

"It is a fact, nevertheless; Lord Croyland is not rich."

"I must have money, Esme. You have jewels if you haven't gold; a thousand pounds would send me flying across continents to Australia, to try my luck and to leave you undisturbed. Come, Esme, it is not a large amount."

"Can you give me time?"

His answer is to put another question.

"Can you give me something to go on with while I am waiting your convenience?"

"There is my purse, Oscar; be merciful to me. Let me go out of your life?"

"Ten pounds!" he mutters as he counts the gold. "It is not much."

"It is all I have. Can you meet me here within a week?"

"This is Thursday. Will this day week suit?"

"Yes."

"And you will not fail to have the money ready?"

"No, unless luck is against me. Now go, lest you should be observed."

"There must be no such thing as luck in the question, Esme," he says, knitting his brow. "I am letting you off very cheaply."

To this challenge she says nothing, but simply walks away from him, a stony look in her eyes, as if despair had suddenly seared her heart.

"I think she will turn up trumps," mutters Oscar Viche; "she knows better than to play with me."

"Gone!" she murmurs, as she sees him disappear. "He wants a thousand pounds. I wonder if Warren would give it to me without asking any questions? No, that would be expecting too much."

She longs to cry, but tears refuse to come, and all she can do is to moan in bitter anguish of soul.

Five days out of the seven have gone, and

yet Esme has not had the courage to ask her husband for even a ten-pound-note, much less a thousand.

At breakfast, on the sixth day, she reads among the fashionable intelligence that the Dowager Lady Croyland is on a visit to Deeside.

"I must do something at once, to-morrow will be too late; Margaret is sure to be at Croylands; once inside the house and the remainder is easy, unless she has removed them."

"Ta, ta, Esme! I won't be home till latish, as after the cricket match we dine at the club."

Never in her short married life has she felt his absence such a relief as on this particular morning.

Within the hour she is en route to Croylands, bent upon saving herself from the clutches of Oscar Viche.

"Dear, dear," says old Margaret, when she sees Esme, "this is indeed kind; but where is my boy? I have longed to see him!"

"Not a word to your mistress of this visit," pleads Esme. "I had almost vowed never to enter Croyland while she lived, but that would be punishing you, so here I am, but I cannot remain long; my husband is well, and sends his love."

Unsuspecting of Esme's motives, the old nurse pays no attention to her movements, but allows her to roam about the mansion at her pleasure.

There is a smile of triumph on Esme's face as she leaves Croylands for London, where she arrives without mishap of any kind.

Never had Warren seen his wife in such high spirits as on the day following her return from Croylands.

"Why, Esme, what has happened since yesterday?" he asks, playfully. "One would think you had come into a fortune!"

"I have had lucky dreams, Warren, about golden rain; but I know you are a sceptic, so I won't say any more."

"I trust you will always have such dreams, dearest, if they make you so light-hearted. But, little sweetheart, your dreams seemed to be troubled last night."

She turns pale as she asks,—

"What did I say, Warren? I know I have a trick of talking in my sleep at times."

"Ah! you must have no secrets from me, or you will be sure to let them out in your sleep. Now, don't look as if you were going to cry, Esme, for, indeed, all you said was 'I have them—saved.'"

"How stupid of me," she laughs; "but it is unfair of you, sir, to lay awake listening to my silly chatter."

"What an escape," she thinks. "If I had mentioned them he might have suspected me. Is there some blight resting upon my life to drag me down just as I have grasped the goal of my ambition—wealth, title, and the love of as noble a man as ever saw the light of day?"

It is Thursday, the day on which Oscar Viche is to call to receive the promised bribe for holding his tongue, and keeping his own counsel about some secret in Esme's life.

It is a lovely evening, with the summer gloaming full of the scent of flowers and of new-mown hay.

On the river, that silent highway, there are pleasure crafts returning home from some adventurous trip, and after escaping the perils of demon steam-launches.

Dinner is over, and husband and wife are taking coffee, and enjoying the cool evening breeze which steals in through the open casement from the river.

"Why, dearest, how remiss of me," remarks Warren.

She looks at him enquiringly, but listens for some signal she is expecting.

"Do you know what day this is?" he asks.

"No."

"Our wedding anniversary. Come, Esme, give me a kiss, and let us wish success to our future domestic life. Let there be only one

heart between us; no secrets to create jealousy, and when each anniversary comes round it will find us happier than the last."

Her kiss is tender, for indeed she loves her husband; but for all that there is a secret in her life which she would not share with him, known to only one other—Oscar Viche.

"I will take a stroll in the garden while you are finishing your coffee, Warren, and as this is a red-letter day for us, you may smoke as well as sip your coffee."

"Oh, thanks; but I prefer joining you in the garden."

She scarcely hears what he is saying, for she is listening to a rich tenor voice singing an Italian ballad.

"What ails her?" thinks Warren, as he rises, and taking his cigar case and fuses hastens after his wife. "I am sure that was a signal; such a conscious look came into her face, and she almost flew out of the room."

"Hush! Esme! someone comes!" says Oscar, as he pockets a small packet and rows quickly away from the spot.

Turning, Esme is confronted by her husband, who clutching her arm with a vice-like grip, says, sternly,—

"Who is that man, and what is he to you?"

(To be continued.)

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

—O—

CHAPTER XI.

CLARENCE SURPRISES HIMSELF.

"You needn't be so awfully afraid of me; I'm not going to eat you," remarked Clarence Maltby, seeing that Elsie was looking as pale as if she were going to faint.

"I don't like being kept here against my will; let me pass, if you please," was the answer.

But she did not take a step forward, as she spoke.

To do so would have been to meet his extended arms, for, standing where he did, he completely blocked up the entrance to the arbour.

"Why don't you come on?" he asked, with a triumphant smile; "I'm ready to meet you half-way."

Elsie made no immediate answer, but she frowned and resumed her seat.

After her first momentary terror she recovered her self-possession, and as she now looked steadily at her unwelcome suitor she said, disdainfully,—

"I presume that you consider your conduct manly? I do not. You know quite well, Mr. Maltby, that if your mother finds you here talking to me that she will not only be very angry, but she will visit her anger upon me, and not upon you; therefore I think it most ungenerous on your part to expose me to misconception."

"Ungenerous!"

The word struck Clarence Maltby as a stronger word would not have done.

If Elsie had told him that his conduct was dishonourable he would have laughed, because he had in his time done many dishonourable things; but it was such a wonderful circumstance for any girl to appeal to his generosity that it roused whatever spark of that feeling, there was in his heart, and he dropped his arms, and answered with some compunction,—

"Well, yes, I'm afraid that's true; the matter always is unjust in that way, and I don't want to drive you from the house, or to make you uncomfortable while you are here; but, hang it all, I must talk to you sometimes, and you never give a fellow a chance."

"You may talk as long as you like if you will let me walk about the garden, or even sit down there," said Elsie, desperately. "I don't mind your mother seeing you talk

to me; it is your being here in this secluded spot that would naturally make her angry."

"And you won't run away from me if I do let you out?" he asked, suspiciously.

"No, I won't!" she answered, eager to be free.

"And you will let me talk to you as long as I like?" was his next stipulation.

"Yes, provided you don't say anything to offend me."

"Very well," he assented, stepping aside but instantly changing his mind he added,—

"You ought to give me a kiss first."

"That I shall not do!" she exclaimed, her eyes flashing, and her pale cheeks flushing with anger. "I wonder at your daring to suggest such a thing."

He laughed loudly.

She looked so beautiful in her anger, and she seemed so sincerely surprised at his presumption, that he could not resist the temptation of saying,—

"There isn't much that I shouldn't be bold enough to suggest if I thought I should get it; but I am going to be on my good behaviour now, and you are not to run away from me."

So saying, he turned and walked away from the arbour, Elsie following him.

Clarence Maltby was surprised at his own moderation, and began to think that he must really be a very much better fellow than he had hitherto believed himself to be.

The appeal to his generosity and manliness had really been a success, and he found that Elsie did not shrink from him as she had previously done.

It was not that she liked him any better than hitherto, but she felt that she must fulfil her share of the implied compact, and she was prepared to do so.

"Don't you think it would be very nice to have a couple of chairs under that tree?" she asked, pointing to a wide-spreading oak that stood within full view of the windows of the house.

"I think it would be just as nice to sit down in the middle of St. Paul's churchyard or Trafalgar-square," he replied, grimly; "but I'll get the chairs if you like."

"Thank you," replied Elsie.

And he went to fetch the chairs himself, that being less troublesome than calling a servant to get them.

But as he did so, he muttered,—

"Aunt Pen was right. I must play my game patiently; she wants lots of humouring, but I think I shall get her in hand at last. I wonder what the old cat meant last night by promising me her money if I married Miss Heath? Wanted to spite my mother, I suspect. She couldn't have had any better motive!"

He came back to the shade of the tree, bringing the chairs with him, but he was not very well pleased when he saw Elsie take from her pocket a small case, from which she unrolled a strip of embroidery, and the coloured silks with which she was working the flowers upon it.

"Oh, hang it all! You're not going to sew, are you?" he asked, with an expression of annoyance. "I hate a woman to sew when I'm talking to her."

"Why?" asked Elsie, feeling that she must make some remark.

"Because she only gives me half of her attention," was the answer.

Elsie looked at him, and repressed an inclination to laugh, as she said, quietly,—

"I have no doubt I shall be able to pay proper attention to what you say, Mr. Maltby, and do my work at the same time; for after all, you cannot have anything very important to tell me."

"You may call it important or not, but I call it so," he retorted in an aggrieved tone, while she proceeded to thread a needle; "and I think when a man tells you that he admires you more than any girl he ever saw, that you might drop that infernal work and look at him."

"But suppose I don't wish to be admired?"

asked the girl, carelessly, and without lifting her eyes to emphasise her question.

"Oh, come now, that's all humbug; every woman likes to be admired."

"You are mistaken," said Elsie, now looking steadily at him. "I am an exception to your rule, for I do not like it; and since by my promise I am bound to listen to you, I wish you would select a more pleasant topic than your fancied admiration for myself."

"Pleasant, indeed! What could be more pleasant?" he asked, angrily.

"Suppose we talk about Miss Birch?" suggested Elsie; "she is coming here on a visit very shortly. Have you known her very long?"

"Hang Miss Birch," he replied, roughly. "I don't want her. She's one of the women that I can't endure, she'll peck her husband's life out of him when she gets one. By Jove, talk of the devil!"

He stopped abruptly, and Elsie looking up quickly, saw Mrs. Burlstone, Miss Birch and Mr. Kingswood coming towards them.

She rose at once, thankful, beyond the power of words to express, that her enforced *l'été-à-tête* with Clarence Maltby was at an end.

Until it was over she did not realise the intense strain that had been upon her; and she felt so unnerved now that she fairly trembled as she spoke to Charlie.

Clarence Maltby was annoyed at the interruption, but being at home he was obliged to be polite, and he called a servant and told him to bring chairs, and to let his mother know they were in the garden when she returned from her drive.

Mrs. Burlstone had come over to invite the Maltbys to an evening party that was rather an impromptu affair, and when she learnt that Mrs. Penfold was visiting them, she suggested that they should all come to dinner.

"I am going to keep you for the night if Mrs. Maltby will spare you," remarked Charlie, addressing herself to Elsie. "I am sure you like dancing; I never met a girl that didn't, and the best of the fun is always at the end."

"You are very kind," replied our heroine, gratefully, "and I shall greatly enjoy it if I can stay."

Clarence frowned, but made no comment, for he and Kingswood were talking about horses and jockeys, as though they had been a couple of grooms.

Presently Mrs. Maltby and Mrs. Penfold returned from their drive, and shortly after this the gong sounded for luncheon, and they all went into the dining-room.

It was an understood thing at Maltby Grange that luncheon was a meal to which anybody who had any acquaintance with the mistress would drop in without invitation, and Mrs. Burlstone and her party sat down to table as a matter of course.

Mrs. Penfold was hungry, and therefore had no time to be particularly disagreeable, and the party at the table was pleasant enough, Charlie and Elsie doing the greater part of the talking.

"You and Mr. Maltby had better come home with us, Miss Heath, and play lawn tennis," said Charlie, as they were rising from table. "You'll spare them, won't you, Mrs. Maltby?"

"No, you'd much better stay here and play," replied that lady. "It will be very dull for Mrs. Penfold and me to be left alone."

Charlie demurred, but Elsie seconded the suggestion, adding that Mrs. Maltby would probably want her to write some letters in the evening.

She dreaded the possibility of having to return at night to the Grange with Clarence Maltby as her solitary escort, and was determined at any cost to avoid it.

Mrs. Burlstone, whose husband was from home for a couple of days, was quite willing to stay where she was, so Charlie's objections

were overruled, and soon after luncheon they went out to the tennis-ground.

Charlie Birch was the most generous-hearted of women, and was quite above any petty jealousy, but she could not help seeing that both of the gentlemen were anxious to secure Elsie for a partner, and that Maltby frowned and Kingswood looked triumphant when the fair secretary fell to the lot of the latter.

When a woman is young, pretty, and rich, and has been much run after in consequence, such an experience as this is not a pleasant one, be she ever so good-natured; and if the truth must be told Charlie did not enjoy this afternoon as much as she ought to have done. She was, however, impartial enough in her own mind to exonerate Elsie from any attempt to win the admiration of either of the gentlemen; indeed, our poor little heroine was so absent-minded, or else was so preoccupied with the game, that she paid little or no heed to the low-toned words, meant only for her ear, that were nothing in themselves, but that were intended to imply a great deal, and with which Kingswood occasionally favoured her.

The three married ladies sat at a distance from the players, alternately talking and watching the game.

Suddenly Mrs. Maltby, who never seemed to notice anybody, startled Elsie by saying,—

"You don't seem to care much for the game, Miss Heath! What is the matter with you?"

"I don't feel quite well," was the answer. "I am tired, and rather sleepy."

"I hope you are not sickening for any of the dreadful complaints that are about?" exclaimed Mrs. Maltby, in sudden alarm.

Her very latest hobby was the sanitary condition of dwellings, and she had heard so much about diseases of late that she began to suspect that a simple headache was the sure precursor of a fever.

But Elsie, who was not easily alarmed, only laughed, as she said,—

"Oh, no, I don't think it is anything at all serious. Those letters this morning rather bothered me because you were not by to tell me exactly what to write, and my head ached when I left the study."

"No wonder," growled Mrs. Penfold; "it's enough to make anybody's head ache to sit stewing in that hot little room hour after hour. I thought so this morning."

"Then it is a pity you didn't select some other room in which to spend the morning," remarked the hostess, frigidly. "The study does for me well enough."

Elsie had returned to the players, and finding herself so closely watched she made a successful effort to throw off her depression.

Well enough she knew that it was not the close study, but the agitating scene in the arbour that had so depressed her: and she wondered if the quiet lesson she had given Clarence Maltby would have the effect of making him treat her with more deference, and of refraining from troubling her with what he was pleased to call his admiration for herself.

She played on for some little time, and then the arrival of other visitors broke up the game.

Colonel St. Vincent and his daughter Barbara were the new-comers, and Elsie looked at them curiously; for though she had not previously seen them she had heard their names several times since she had been here, and she wondered whether what she had heard about them was true.

The Colonel was tall and grey, severe looking and soldierly.

It was only natural, of course, that, having spoken or bowed to those present, whose faces he knew, he should take a chair and sit it down close to Mrs. Maltby, to whom he devoted all his attention.

He might have had something of importance to say to her about her schools—her sham

political intrigues, or her sanitary mania—probably he had.

At any rate, he seemed very much interested in his subject, and the lady to whom he talked listened with pleased attention.

Elsie saw this, and she likewise observed that Clarence Maltby every now and again cast angry glances at the elderly couple, and that he resisted all Miss St. Vincent's attempts to concentrate his attention upon herself.

Yet they seemed to be very old friends of the Maltbys, for the young people addressed each other by their Christian names, and when Elsie offered to relinquish her place in the game to Miss St. Vincent that young lady accepted it at once.

The rest of the players were not well pleased with this, but our heroine was not at all sorry to be able to take a chair at a little distance, and to watch the game without, however, taking any real interest in it.

She was still suffering from the nervous and repressed agitation caused by Clarence Maltby's presence in the arbour, and though she had succeeded in reducing him to something like proper behaviour, she could not help feeling that he had established a sort of right to talk to her, that, if persisted in by him, might lead to very unpleasant consequences.

"If I could only get away from this place, only get something else to do," she thought sadly. "It isn't the amount of work that I have to do here; I could do ten times as much, willingly and with comfort. It is that dreadful young man that terrifies me. The idea of his presumption in wanting to kiss me! I think I shall die if he ever attempts to do so!"

Her thoughts must have been reflected in her face, for a startled look came into her eyes, and she became suddenly pale, as a sharp keen-edged voice at her elbow remarked, "You've been a good deal put out to-day, Miss Heath?"

"I!" she exclaimed, turning quickly, and meeting Mrs. Penfold's steely grey eyes.

"Yes, you!" was the answer; "something has worried you. What is it?"

"Nothing, thank you," replied Elsie, coldly; but, recollecting herself, she added, "nothing at least that would interest you."

Then, changing her tone, she said with genuine admiration,—

"Look at Miss St. Vincent, doesn't she play splendidly!"

"Yes, and her father plays his game just as well," responded the old woman dryly. "There's no fool like an old fool, particularly if she's got money of her own, and thinks she can do what she likes with it."

Elsie glanced in the direction indicated by this remark, and even she could not misunderstand the object of Colonel St. Vincent's visit; and, judging from the pleased look on Mrs. Maltby's face, his suit could not be considered an unwelcome one.

"It will make a considerable difference to Clarence if his mother does make a second marriage," continued Mrs. Penfold, looking intently at her companion's face.

"Will it?" was the indifferent response.

"Yes, he will no longer be master here;," said the strange old woman, "neither will he be able to draw upon his mother's purse as he does now; and as for you, your occupation will be gone. The Colonel isn't like poor Maltby; he won't let his wife follow her own devices, and fling her money away as she has done."

"Can he help it?" asked Elsie, feeling that it was useless to try to silence Mrs. Penfold, or to get her to talk on any other subject.

"Well, legally he can't," replied the old lady, shaking her head; "but practically he will. And then there is that big daughter of his; she will live with them, and if Clarence doesn't marry her—as he won't—she'll drive him out of the house. But she'll get you out of the house first, Miss Heath—she doesn't approve of you."

"That is very sad," responded Elsie, with undisguised contempt; "but I don't think she will have any difficulty in driving me away."

"No, neither do I," observed the old lady,

significantly. Then, as though moved by a sudden impulse, she added,—

"You can come to me if you like when you leave here, I sometimes want a companion."

Elsie looked at her in astonishment, then she laughed heartily as she said,—

"You told me last evening that you never wished to see my face again."

"I've no need to wish to see it," retorted Mrs. Penfold, rising from her seat and speaking with unnecessary bitterness; "for it reminds me at every turn of the face of one who is dead!"

And having said this she walked away, leaving Elsie to look after her with feelings of vague dismay.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT SHE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO UNDO.

FOR several succeeding days after the events just recorded Elsie's life at Maltby Grange passed uneventfully enough; the projected dinner and dance at the Buristones did not come off, and nothing unusual occurred.

Mrs. Penfold shut herself up a good deal in her own room with her maid, who was in her way quite as peculiar as her mistress.

She was an old woman, being close upon sixty, and there was something weird and witch-like in her dark, yellow face.

Her features were sharp, regular, and clearly cut; her thin lips closed tightly over her small yellow teeth; while her pointed chin, her sharp nose, and her keen, piercing black eyes gave her the appearance of one who knew much more than the majority of her sex; of one, indeed, who could see things usually hidden from the ken of ordinary mortals.

At Maltby Grange none of the servants took a liking to Nan Perran, nor she to any of them. While at Trebartha she was both shunned and feared; the simple Cornish folk believing, without hesitation, that she had certain dark dealings with the Evil One.

She was a silent woman, rarely opening her lips unless directly addressed, and she and her mistress seemed to live together rather from the force of habit than from any mutual liking.

To Elsie this woman was an enigma, and, it must be confessed an object of secret dread.

She had been at first struck by the manner in which Perran had stood staring at her instead of attending her unconscious mistress; and now, whenever they met, the singular being seemed unable to remove her eyes from the beautiful face of the embarrassed girl.

It is not pleasant to be regularly stared at by the same person without any apparent cause for the objectionable attention; and Elsie, after having at first been troubled by this behaviour, had at length felt some resentment at it.

She never said a word to this effect, but there was something in her glance, and in the way in which she held her head when the woman's eyes were fixed upon her, which soon revealed to Nan Perran the feelings with which the young lady regarded her.

To Elsie's intense relief she was not persecuted by Clarence Maltby's attentions during these few days.

She took very good care now not to give him an opportunity of speaking to her alone; and he, from prudential reasons, did not venture to excite his mother's anger, by being more than just civil to the secretary in her presence.

Once, indeed, our heroine had seen him slip a letter between the leaves of a book she had been reading; but as he found it unopened and in the same place the next morning, he quietly destroyed it himself, probably thinking that it would be undesirable for it to fall into the hands of his mother.

So the days slipped by, until the guests whom Mrs. Maltby had invited for various lengths of time, extending from a day to a fortnight, began to arrive.

First of all came Charlie Birch.

To her had been given the longest invitation, and most of the other guests were vaguely supposed to be coming to help to entertain her.

She was not in very good spirits, however, for the Burlstones had gone to Scotland; she would return to her own house in Devonshire when she left Maltby Grange, and Mrs. Maltby would scarcely have felt flattered if she had known that Charlie only fulfilled her promise of coming here for Elsie's sake.

So she told herself, at least; but it is quite possible that the hope that she should meet Harry Kingswood, and should spend some time under the same roof with him, was not without its influence in bringing her here.

Not that she would have admitted this to herself for a moment; but there are some feelings that will not be stifled, and that will insist upon asserting themselves, however much we may try to close our eyes to their existence.

Perhaps this was the reason that Charlie found life at the Grange so very slow and uninteresting until Harry Kingswood arrived. Certain it is that her spirits rose considerably from that time.

Lionel Denison's friend was bright, cheerful, and handsome; to use his own expression, he "thought Charlie Birch was very good fun," and he rather enjoyed the privilege of carrying on a more or less serious flirtation with her.

But he was not going to allow Miss Birch to monopolise him.

She was a charming girl in her way, and her attractions were in nowise diminished by her very handsome fortune; but though Kingswood was not a wealthy man he had enough to live upon, and there was an old uncle in the background, rolling in wealth, and a martyr to the gout, who might take it into his head when he departed this life to provide so well for Harry that a fortune with a wife would not be absolutely necessary.

Such was the condition of affairs when Harry Kingswood came to Maltby Grange on a visit for a week.

He was not positively in love with Elsie, and he was still less so with Charlie Birch, and it is quite possible that he might not have lost his heart to his friend's ward, if the girl herself had not been so calmly indifferent to him.

There are some men who never value what is won easily, or what may be had for the asking.

Also, there are some men who seem to delight in breaking the tenth commandment, and who not only covet their neighbours' goods, but try to get them also.

It was rather ungrateful of Kingswood to try to win for himself the prize for which Lionel Denison was seeking, and he felt this more than once, though he easily solaced himself with the reflection that all is fair in love and war.

Be this as it may, he never breathed a hint to his friend about having, as he believed, discovered Elsie's whereabouts; and when he said good-bye to him at the conclusion of his protracted visit to the Hermitage, he was hypocritical enough to express a hope that the lost girl would soon be found.

He felt rather small, however, in his own estimation when he had done this, and the sensation of self-humiliation was an unpleasant one, for he was one of those men who cared less for the opinion of the world than for the approval of his own conscience.

The very outrage to his own esteem which he thus committed, made his pursuit of Elsie a doubly dangerous pastime, and caused his behaviour to seem quite inconsistent to Charlie, who was the one interested watcher of the play.

As for Elsie herself, she desired not the admiration of any man.

Sorrow had touched her young life with gloom, at that critical moment when she was

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

The future for her had henceforth a mystery in it, not untinged with tragedy.

Therefore, the adulation of these two men who hovered about her was but like the buzzing of unpleasant flies about her head; and though she tried to be patient with Kingswood, in consideration of his being Lionel Denison's friend, she was now more glad than hitherto to retire to the study and try to write out in tolerable English some adventures in Ireland, which Mrs. Maltby had once committed to paper.

It was not interesting work, but it was better to be here than to take her place among the guests, making Charlie Birch jealous by the way in which Kingswood bent over her, and talked in low tones in her ear, or startling Mrs. Maltby into flashing her big, black eyes upon her, as some word or glance from Clarence warned the suspicious mother that there was danger ahead.

As lookers-on usually see most of the game, so Mrs. Penfold, when she did condescend to join the rest of the company, amused herself, in her own grim way, by watching these four people when they were most unconscious of her observation.

Innocence and indifference were about the best safeguards that a girl in our poor heroine's position could have; and the old lady, who had been a beauty herself in her own day, and had known what temptation meant, could not but marvel at the calm dignity with which this young girl went through her daily tasks.

To an outsider it was wonderful how she helped to entertain the company with her fresh, sweet voice—was seemingly content to be one in any party of pleasure, or to be left out of it; and yet how steadily she ignored the infatuation and the jealousy of each other, which Kingswood and young Maltby daily found it more difficult to hide.

Mrs. Maltby was, perhaps, a little more blind than usual at this time, by reason of the fact that she had managed to gather together a good many rather incongruous people under her roof.

A few evenings after his arrival she took Kingswood by the arm, and walking with him to the end of her long drawing-room, said mysteriously,—

"You see that fair, florid man, with the spectacles on? That is Major Golf."

She spoke in such a singular manner, and there was something so very anomalous about the good-looking, middle-aged German, whom she thus pointed out, that Kingswood felt impelled to ask, jestingly,—

"And who is Major Golf?"

"You have never heard of Major Golf?" asked the lady in real, or affected surprise. "His name is known everywhere; there is not a throne in Europe that does not tremble at his name. It was he who planned the death of the Emperor of Russia!"

"Good heavens, madam! You don't mean to say that you allow a miscreant like that to sit under your roof!" cried Kingswood, in genuine dismay. "Surely you cannot know what you are doing?"

"C'est mon affaire!" retorted the lady, angrily.

And she relinquished his arm, spread out her hands, and made a mock obeisance; then turned away, leaving him dumb, for the moment, with amazement.

"By Jove! this is about the oddest thing I ever heard of," muttered the young man, as soon as he recovered the use of his tongue. "I suppose I have received my *congé* because I have dared to express my disapproval of assassination. Well, I don't much care; they are a queer lot here, and I'm watched so jealously by Charlie, and by that coarse brute, Maltby, that I can't get a word alone with Elsie. She won't be here long, that's quite clear, and I can precipitate matters at any

time by letting Denison know her whereabouts."

Then he made his way to the side of Miss Birch, said a few words to her in a low tone, and, despite her flushed face and her evident protest, he shook hands with her, and slowly and carelessly walked out of the room.

In the hall, just as he was about to ascend the stairs, he met Elsie, who was leaving the study, and his whole manner changed.

He came eagerly to her side, and said, in quick, earnest tones,—

"I am going away, Miss Heath. I am glad to be able to say good-bye to you, but I hope we shall soon meet again."

He took her hand as he spoke, and held it, while she looked at him in surprise with widely opened eyes as she repeated,—

"Going away! I thought you were to stay till the end of the week?"

"So did I; but I am dismissed. You will think of me sometimes, won't you; and—may I write to you? Will you answer my letters if I do write?"

"Oh no; I have neither time nor inclination for correspondence on my own account," she replied, trying to withdraw her hand.

But he held it firmly—bent over and pressed it to his lips; then, seeing that he had made her angry, he released the hand and tried to murmur an apology, but she turned away without a word, and retreated to the study. And he, turning quickly round to ascend the stairs, came face to face with Clarence Maltby.

This young man had been sent to the guest by his mother to apologise for her hasty speech, and to beg that he would not think of going away, for to be inhospitable was utterly foreign to the nature of the mistress of this house.

The sight of Kingswood kissing Elsie's hand, however, was quite enough to excite the son, and to drive all other thoughts from his mind; and, losing control of his temper as he met his rival's face, he demanded,—

"Was it Miss Heath's hand that you kissed?"

Kingswood was no coward, quite the reverse, and in any personal encounter he would, he well knew, be more than a match for the rather flabby young man who had been tied too much to his mother's apronstrings to excel in any athletic exercise.

The prospect, also, of being able to relieve his mind by a few disagreeable remarks was irresistible, and he now looked at his interlocutor coolly, and even insolently, as he replied calmly,—

"It was, sir. Have you any objection to my kissing that lady's hand?"

"Objection? I should think I have; it's like your impudence. She is my mother's secretary, she is under our protection, you have no right to insult her."

"Pray don't excite yourself, my good fellow. I am about the last man in the world to insult Miss Heath, and I don't think, if she had a choice in the matter, she would select you as her champion. Good-night, give my compliments to Mrs. Maltby, and tell her that I am sorry I ever consented to become her guest."

Then he went up the stairs, leaving Clarence standing in the hall, a prey to conflicting emotions.

He had been angry with his mother when Charlie Birch told him what had happened, and Mrs. Maltby was so far penitent that she had sent him to detain the departing guest.

But after this exchange of incivilities between Kingswood and himself, he felt it to be impossible to ask the man to stay, while it was likewise very certain, to his own mind, that no amount of eloquence on his part would be able to heal the breach thus made.

"Hang the fellow!" he muttered, savagely; "he did not come at my invitation, and 'tisn't I who've sent him away. Let him go, and 'tis the coast will then be more clear for me. But she's a horrid little flirt, and I'll tell her so. Letting him kiss her hand indeed. It's more than I've



[HE HELD ELFIE'S HAND FIRMLY, BENT OVER, AND PRESSED IT TO HIS LIPS.]

ever been able to do. But I'll just have a talk with her. I've got my lady in a corner at last!"

So saying, he opened the door of the study very gently, and walked in.

The gas was burning low; the fire, which was quite unnecessary at this time of the year, had long since burned out, but besides himself, the room was destitute of a living occupant.

This room was one of a long suite, and besides the door leading from the hall, which was opposite the windows, there were two other doors facing each other, one of which led to a small library, while the other communicated with a little drawing-room, which again led into a larger one, so that anyone could walk the whole length of that side of the house without coming into the hall or passages.

In this way Elfie had gone without his seeing her, and when he reached the room in which the guests were assembled he found her seated at the piano, playing the accompaniment to a song for the florid German whom Mrs. Maltby had spoken of as Major Golf.

He seemed a very harmless conspirator if one might judge by the outer man.

He sang a good song, and, despite his bulk, he was a very desirable partner for a valse.

If he held extreme opinions he was always careful not to ventilate them; but he was intelligent, well informed, and he spoke sensibly and moderately, like a man who had some respect for the opinions of other people.

Oh! he does all that to mystify you," Mrs. Maltby explained to one incredulous guest, and she did not convince her listener that the Major was a dangerous character, when, the following day, she drove to a very small house in Fulham, where "the disturber

of the peace of Europe" lived with his widowed sister.

But we have nearly done with Mrs. Maltby's crotchets.

They are only interesting in so far as they influence the destiny of our heroine, and matters are coming to a crisis on her behalf with alarming rapidity.

For the rest of that evening Clarence kept as close to Elfie, as though he had been her shadow.

Talk to whom she would, sit where she would, go where she would, there he was close by her side, not always looking at her, not even as if he were keeping guard over her, but there he was all the same.

Charlie Birch likewise was not quite herself this evening.

Her eyes were brighter than usual.

The colour of her cheeks was more vivid than it was won't to be, and there was an air of repressed excitement about her which Elfie could not fail to observe.

"I will come to your room before I go to bed; wait up for me," she whispered to our heroine, as the party was breaking up for the night, and Elfie promised to do so.

But she had to wait up for another reason than this.

Mrs. Maltby, who was the most uncertain creature under the sun, took Elfie's arm, made her come to her room with her, and kept her there for a long while, talking about those Irish adventures, while the lady's-maid loosened her hair and disrobed her.

At length the girl was free, and she hurried along the corridor to the foot of a flight of stairs which led to the next floor, upon which was her room.

The gas had been turned out, and the servants had retired to their own part of the building, but Elfie knew the stairs well, and she was just about to ascend them when she was caught in the strong arms of a man, who

tried to cover her mouth with her hand, while he said, in a low whisper,—

"It's my turn now!"

Elfie recognised the voice, and the wild terror that came over her knew no control.

With a strength that surprised Clarence, she struggled in his grasp and uttered a loud, piercing shriek, which had echoed through the whole house before he could silence her.

"It's all up now," he muttered, as he heard his mother's door opened; "you've done to-night, my girl, what you'll never be able to undo."

(To be continued.)

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.—How strange it is that ideas in various parts of the globe are so contradictory. For instance, take the question of girls. In spite of our advancing ideas, we have a general conviction that girls should not be put to very hard work. We shield them if we can. In Asia and Africa, on the contrary, in spite of all we are always hearing of the lazy lives of women in those countries, an old belief prevails that they were born to labour. The same is true in many parts of Germany. In Turkestan and on the Tartar steppes, the Kirghese sultanas and their daughters, in whose veins flow the blood of long lines of kings, still milk the sheep, cows, and goats, and perform the menial duties of the household. They reverse the order of things. The mother wears silk and the daughter calico; the mother cultivates accomplishments and the daughter does the drudgery; in fact, they really consider the mother entitled to the best of everything! Such is it to be uncivilised. There the mother is at home in the parlour and the daughter in the kitchen, and we would look in vain for the child too fashionable and well-educated to scorn her mother. What a blessed state of affairs!



[THE NEXT MOMENT MERVYN LESLIE WAS SPRAWLING ON THE GROUND.]

NOVELETTE.]

NELL'S FORTUNE.

—10—

CHAPTER I.

Her name was Nell. I don't in the least doubt that when she applied for her present highly-desirable post as governess in Colonel Lindsay's family she signed her letter "Ellen." I feel convinced that all the references the Colonel—or, rather, his female relations for him—wrote to inquire about her spoke of the young candidate as Ellen Adair, but, nevertheless, to all who loved her the girl was Nell.

And the name just suited her. At twenty-one she looked about eighteen. She had a slender, willowy figure, a simple, childlike grace, a wild-rose bloom, and two blue eyes, just the hue of an Italian sky.

Of course she had not a good feature in her face; Miss Lindsay said so, and meant the verdict in praise rather than otherwise. Of course she was shy and inexperienced—reasons the more for cutting down the salary; but let me tell you one fact about the child which Miss Lindsay never troubled her head about—she had the sweetest smile you ever saw.

See her now on the first day of her new duties. As yet the family lingered in town, and Nell came down ready dressed at twelve to promenade her pupils in the Park, in spite of the July sunshine.

A tight-fitting blue cambric dress, a shabby white hat, and long tan gloves, the simplest costume imaginable, and yet one unspeakably becoming.

Maude and Violet Lindsay, twins of eight years old, walked demurely on either side, and poor Nell caught herself wondering at every turn whether the fierce scholastic person the children addressed continually as "Miss Adair" be really her very self.

For Nell had led a very free, Bohemian sort

of life with her kind old father. Together the two had battled a great many hardships, but the artist's heart was as light as his purse, and while he lived the world seemed a pleasant place enough to Nell.

Then came two years' long illness, after which the doctor, who had known her from a child, declared there must be no more exposure to all weathers, but Nell must take a position in some family of rank.

The position was found, and Nell installed therein; but it strikes me the child was happier in her old independence. Here she felt something like a bird in a cage.

The twins were good little things, as children go, and pretty, too. They had no mother to spoil them, and their maiden aunt was disposed to look graciously on any one who kept them in order; but, in spite of all that, Nell felt like a stranger in a foreign land.

She mourned for the two narrow rooms she had been wont to call home, and for the independence she had lost.

In the tall house at Kensington she seemed to have no place. When once the children were in bed she was a nonentity, and Nell hardly relished the position.

They had walked their appointed time, and had left the Gardens. Standing waiting to cross the road they were delayed for some time. It was in the days of the Fisheries' Exhibition, and as their way was very much in the same direction as the pleasure-seekers perhaps the crush was hardly surprising.

A child in either hand, Nell was preparing for a desperate plunge when her attention was drawn to an old lady who stood beside her, looking so utterly helpless that Miss Adair's compassion was excited.

The stranger was evidently from the country. The rich materials and old-fashioned shape of her attire showed that. All her minor appendages were suspended to her waistband, and hung at various distances on her skirt—an umbrella, a smelling-bottle, a

fan, a black reticule, a guide to the Fisheries, and a basket of fruit being a few of the articles thus disposed of.

The poor old lady looked helplessly up and down, too nervous and upset to take advantage of a lull in the crowd of carriages.

"One whole hour," she murmured, dolefully, "have I waited here! Why isn't there a policeman? There ought to be a policeman at every corner."

A rude boy muttered, "If so the number of the force would require to be doubled;" a few others jeered, but no one offered the slightest assistance till Nell, fairly roused to sympathy (after a whispered word to Maude and Violet to stand perfectly still, and wait for her), valiantly offered her arm to the old lady.

"I have lived in London all my life," she said, simply. "I will help you across in no time if you will allow me."

The old lady clutched at the slender prop offered her with right goodwill. She was stout, and she clung to Nell with such heartiness that a good portion of her weight fell on the young creature, but the result was success. In a minute Nell had her safely landed on the other side, puffing and panting, but still safe.

"My dear," exclaimed the stout lady, "I'm sure I'm very much obliged."

"It is nothing; I am glad to have helped you."

"But you'll let me know your name, my dear. I assure you Bet Higgins is not ungrateful."

Eager to get back to the children Nell gave her name a little hastily, and, when it was demanded, her address.

Then Mrs. Higgins went on her hunt after pleasure, and the little governess with her charges sauntered home.

There was nothing to recall the adventure, no thread of memory to make Nell think of it a second time. Before she had reached the house the matter was well-nigh forgotten.

She spent the afternoon in the school-room, for nurse was busy packing up for to-morrow's removal, and so her premises were forbidden ground to the twins.

These latter did not distress themselves. They clung to Nell, and told her how glad they should be to get into the country again; how father was the best man in the whole world; and the Dell just the prettiest house she could fancy.

The little chatterboxes further volunteered their black frocks twice for mother. She had been dead one—no, two winters.

Did they remember her? Oh, yes; she was very white and tired—not a bit like father; father was never too tired to play with them.

The Dell was in Hampshire, in one of those pretty villages which seem to have sprang up of late years so near the coast as to be within a walk of the sea, so far inland as to give all country pleasures.

The Dell was a small estate. Colonel Lindsay was not a rich man, for his position. He depended chiefly on his wife's fortune, which had been invested in some wonderful company which seemed to be succeeding, but yet required a large capital to make the seeming a reality.

Miss Lindsay presided over the Dell, where the Colonel used to keep open house. It was the spinster's custom to invite a bevy of beautiful girls, and hope her brother would choose among them a stepmother for Maude and Violet. The Colonel added a few fellow-officers, so that visitors were not scarce.

"Do you like the Dell?" the children asked, a little anxiously, two days after their arrival.

"It seems like fairyland."

"Wouldn't you like to live here always?"

But Nell refused to give an opinion on this weighty point, and a summons to the library created a diversion.

Here she found Colonel Lindsay waiting to be introduced to her—a grave, soldierly man, looking older than his five-and-thirty years.

"I hope you will be happy with us, Miss Adair," he said, kindly, and then he seemed to dismiss her wholly from his mind, and for days afterwards she never even saw him.

This was hardly strange. Miss Lindsay expected the children and their governess in the drawing-room from four till six, but the Colonel was seldom indoors at that time.

This daily infliction grew a great bugbear to Nell. No one spoke to her, no one tried to make the time pass pleasantly to her. She just sat there among Miss Lindsay's guests, but not of them.

It was a hard position for any girl, but to Nell it was galling. She loved company dearly. In her father's lifetime, despite his poverty, she had known many clever men, and been made much of by them, and now to be ignored—coldly, politely, but decidedly ignored—seemed to her hard lines.

She must have been a month at the Dell; July had ripened into August; she was beginning to feel quite an old inhabitant of the quaint old gabled house, when one afternoon an event occurred which made her almost forget the last dreary years, and fancy herself a happy girl again at home with her father.

And this wonder, this strange occurrence? It was nothing more, nothing less than the sight of a friend!

She was walking with the children in the leafy shrubberies when a turn in the path brought her suddenly face to face with a young man; one instant, and the blushes dyed Nell's cheek.

She had recognised a favourite art-pupil of her father, one who had studied with him a whole winter, and that was five years ago.

The shy, awkward child of sixteen had ripened into a pretty, attractive woman; the stripling of twenty-one was a tall, bearded man, with an air of fashion about his whole bearing, and a gloss upon his clothes which had been absent in those other days.

"Nell."

It was his first greeting. The word almost escaped him, in spite of himself. Then he added, in quite another tone,—

"Is it possible? I should never have believed it!"

"Have believed what, Mr. Leslie?"

"That my little friend of other days had ripened into such a beautiful maiden. How is Mr. Adair? Shall I have the pleasure of meeting him here?"

The colour died out of her cheeks—the light faded from her beautiful eyes.

"I have lost dad," she murmured. "It is more than two years since he had to leave me."

"Not dead!" said Mervyn, with a ring of true sympathy in his voice, as he remembered how dearly the two had loved each other. "Surely not that?"

"Yes," answered Nell, in her sad, quiet little voice; "just that. I don't think, save for leaving me, he was sorry. Mr. Leslie, you see he was so tired—his life had been one long failure."

Mervyn sighed. His life had changed very much since the days he visited the Adairs; but, taken altogether, he almost fancied the old time had been happier than the new.

"And you are staying here, Miss Adair?" Maude and Violet, tired of the interruption, had sauntered on. To do the twins justice they were not eavesdroppers. They never thought of telling their aunt of the encounter.

"I am living here," corrected Nell, gently. "Do you mean for good? That Colonel Lindsay is your guardian?"

Nell laughed.

"I haven't got such a thing. Only housekeepers have. I mean that Colonel Lindsay pays me forty pounds a-year to live here as governess to his children."

A moment's silence.

"And you like it?"

"I don't think I like anything now."

"But they are good to you?"

"They are very kind, only it is not like the old days; and each week that comes I seem to miss dad more and more."

"Poor little soul!"

The blue eyes filled with tears.

"Did Italy satisfy you, Mr. Leslie?" she asked, bravely, stifling her grief, and trying to take an interest in his lot.

"I cannot tell you, Nell. I never went."

"You never went?"

"Never."

"But you were set on going. You were to be there six months, and become a great painter!"

"I never went to Italy, Nell, and I don't think I have touched a paint-brush since the dear old days you know of."

"But—"

"It is a very simple story, Nell. My journey was arranged, all my preparations made, when I received a telegram from my uncle."

Nell opened her eyes.

"But you weren't on speaking terms. He had quite disowned you?"

"Yes; but his only son had died suddenly, and I was the last of his family. He offered to adopt me and provide for all my expenses, just as though I had been his son."

Nell looked surprised.

"But I thought you wanted to be a painter?"

"So I did; but I might have been years before I made bread-and-cheese at that."

"Then, don't you do anything?"

Mr. Leslie hardly liked this point-blank question.

"I look after the estate a little when we are at Port Leslie, and I ride and fish and hunt; then in town I visit and go to see everything worth seeing. I assure you, Nell, I find plenty to do."

"And you live with your uncle?"

"When I'm in the country. He keeps very comfortable chambers for me in town. Oh, I have a very pleasant time of it. The old

fellow has one or two peculiar whims, but he is pretty easy-going on the whole."

The "whims" were an absolute refusal to allow his heir to undertake any kind of professional duties. Sir James preferred Mervyn to be entirely dependent upon himself. He allowed him a thousand a-year—gave him to understand his income would be handsomely increased whenever he chose to marry, provided he selected a suitable wife. So much for whim number one.

Number two was rather worse. Sir James was intensely anxious for his nephew's marriage, but he stipulated for so many things in the young lady selected for his wife that he made the device a very hard one.

In the meantime, Mervyn Leslie took life easy, and found a good deal of enjoyment in it. His career was very different from the one he had mapped out for himself.

The talented young artist had degenerated into a careless young man of fashion. Everyone spoilt him, and until he came face to face with little Nell, and saw the look of disappointment in her blue eyes, it never occurred to him he had at all failed in his life's course.

Somehow the sight of Nell gave him a pang of remorse.

At twenty-six he was nothing in his own right—a mere puppet, dependent on his uncle's will; while this girl, whom he remembered as a mere child, was toiling hard in life's battlefield for daily bread.

How pretty she was! He never remembered her as particularly attractive in the old days. Now it seemed to him there was a strange charm in her blue eyes, and he found himself wishing eagerly that when his uncle found that *rara avis* to whom he must offer his hand she might have a face and voice like Miss Adair.

"I must go!"

"Why?" asked Mervyn, sharply, little vexed for anyone to cross his wishes. "You have hardly been here ten minutes, and I have heaps to tell you."

She shook her head.

"The children will want me."

"I want you!"

"Ah, but you can find plenty of other companions with whom to pass the time away, and my time belongs to the little girls."

"How horribly conscientious you have grown, Nell!" then, seeing her flush, "I mean Miss Adair, but the old name comes easiest."

She smiled.

"The other is best. No one calls me Nell now."

"Why not?"

"I think when one becomes scholastic one's Christian name is forgotten. It belongs to the relics of one's youth."

"You talk as if you were Methuselah, and you look—"

"I look what?"

"A mere baby."

She smiled, and almost before he knew it Mervyn Leslie was standing alone in the winding path.

"Poor Adair!" muttered the future baronet. "What a brave soul he had, and that child is like him; but it must have gone hard with her to take to teaching after her free, easy life!"

Mr. Leslie was not left long to pursue these reflections. Another moment, and Miss Lindsay came up to him, with Lady Joan Carisbrooke at her side.

Lady Joan possessed to an unlimited degree an equable temper. Nothing put her out; nothing made her nervous. She knew perfectly well that Miss Lindsay had invited her to the Dell for its master to fall in love with her. She was also aware that Sir James considered her a most suitable match for his heir; but she was not one whit disconcerted by this. She came to the Dell as gladly as she was invited.

She made herself agreeable to the children; gossiped with the hostess, rode with her host, and flirted in a quiet way with Mervyn Leslie—at least, she had done all this on her former visit to Hampshire the year before, and she

was quite willing to begin again, though she had only arrived the previous evening.

Joan was not pretty. High-bred, slim, and intensely good-natured, she had plenty of attractions besides the twenty thousand pounds which constituted her fortune.

She was an orphan, and at twenty-five her guardian exercised a very easy will over her. It was well-known that Lady Joan would be allowed to consult her own taste in choosing a partner for life.

She looked her best this August morning. Her dark eyes were bright, her cheek had a warm glow from exercise. She wore a pretty French cambrie costume; its pervading tint pink, and her mouth was wreathed in smiles as she spoke to Mr. Leslie.

"Positively alone?" she said, gaily. "What mischief were you plotting?"

"None at all. I think, Lady Joan, you ought to pity me. I was suffering from a bad fit of the blues."

"The blues at your time of life?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"There is but one remedy for it, is there, Priscilla?" turning to Miss Lindsay. "Plenty of occupation. Hard work is your only cure, Mr. Leslie."

"I feel much better already. Since the oracle has spoken, will it kindly proclaim the style of labour? Shall I go diligently boating every day, and row the stoutest people I can find from Bournemouth to Swaage? Shall I go about mending pots and pans, like an itinerant tinker, or—"

"Neither," interrupted Lady Joan. "You shall think of some fresh amusements for us. Here's Miss Lindsay fair at her wits' end thinking of something that hasn't been hackneyed, and I've undertaken to help her, and I feel my hair turning grey under the process. Now, we'll turn the task over to you, and it will cure your 'blues,' as well as rid us of a very considerable embarrassment."

Leslie whistled.

"I'll do my best, but—"

"No buts, remember. It is our province to command; yours to obey."

"But tell me one thing. How many people shall I be expected to amuse?"

"We number twenty with your uncle, who comes this evening," said Miss Lindsay, gravely.

"Precisely," laughed Lady Joan. "Now, Priscilla, we'll leave him to his task and go indoors. I want to see the children."

As Miss Lindsay hoped Lady Joan would be the children's stepmother she ought to have gratified this wish, but she demurred,—

"They will be at lessons, Joan."

"Lessons! Those scraps?"

"I assure you they are making excellent progress. I engaged a governess for them while we were in town, and—"

"Poor little morsels! Shut up with some vixenish old Minerva. I wonder you didn't teach them yourself, Priscilla, if they must learn lessons?"

"My nerves are not equal."

"And so you engaged a vinegarish old maid, and delivered the children bodily into her hands? You don't deserve to have nieces, Priscilla."

"I'm sure I wish I hadn't. I mean, of course, they are dear little things, but it would be a relief to me if they had a mother to see after them."

"A mother without nerves!"

"Precisely. I cannot imagine why Bertram doesn't marry; unless, indeed, he has fixed his affections on some bright, particular star, and feels afraid to risk all."

She meant Lady Joan by the "one bright, particular star," and the heiress knew it; but the late Lady Mary Lindsay having been her first cousin, she had visited at the Della a great deal in her lifetime, and honestly believed the having endured five years of such a married existence was quite sufficient to make Colonel Lindsay remain a widower for the rest of his days. He and Joan were the best of friends—

a good sign they had no intention of being anything more.

"Then you won't come?"

This was when they had got indoors, and Lady Joan was resolutely turning towards the next wing, where the nurseries and school-room were situated.

"Certainly not. Miss Adair might justly resent my interference. Besides, the children are always in the drawing-room from four till six. Wait and see them then."

"No; I'll beard Minerva in her den."

She tossed her hat into a hall chair, and went upstairs. It was long past twelve, so she had very little hesitation about interrupting lessons. The schoolroom door stood half-way ajar. She pushed it open, and walked in without the ceremony of knocking. But she was hardly prepared for the picture that met her eyes. A slight, fragile looking girl, almost a child, sat in a low chair by the open window. In spite of her plain holland dress and leather belt she looked a piece of dainty refinement. The children were at her feet. The August sunshine strayed over her hair, turning it to waves of gold. There was a wistful smile on her lips, and something sad in the beauty of her blue eyes, but there was nothing doleful or grumbling in her voice, as she said,—

"So Beauty married the Prince and lived happy ever afterwards."

"Another," demanded Miss Lindsay, with an affectionate hug, "Oh, goody, dear, do tell us another."

"Yes," chimed in Violet. "You know it wants a whole quarter-of-an-hour to dinner time, and—"

"Children, children, you are perfectly insatiable," called a blithe voice near them. The twins rushed to their feet and ran to Joan.

"Come," suggested the heiress, gaily, "aren't you going to introduce me to your governess?"

Maude performed the ceremony very simply.

"This is Cousin Joan," she said to Nell. "We used to like her better than anyone in the world, except father."

"And don't you now?" asked Lady Joan, in comical dismay. "How have I offended you, chicks?"

"You come so seldom, and you're always busy downstairs. Now we can have Miss Adair *always*," with a strong stress on the last word; "and so we mean to like her best."

Lady Joan laughed.

"Do you know, Miss Adair, I thought myself very brave in venturing to the schoolroom at all. I expected to find it presided over by a tall, gaunt-looking spinster in spectacles, and to see these hapless children crying on either side of her."

"We never cry," in indignant choros from the twins, and then their nurse coming and tearing them forcibly off to be dressed for dinner, Lady Joan and the governess were perforce alone.

"You look a mere child!" cried the heiress, kindly. "However could your people let you come and shut yourself up here? You might as well be in a convent."

Nell sighed.

"I haven't got any people."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. I don't think I have a relation in the world. When my father died I kept on our old home, and used to go out giving music lessons; only I caught cold in the spring, and then I was very ill. When I grew better the doctor got me this situation."

"And do you like it?"

Nell opened her eyes.

"I like the children."

"And Miss Lindsay?"

"Yes," but the yes was fainter.

"And my cousin, the Colonel?"

"I never see him."

"Does Miss Lindsay confide her troubles to you?"

"I didn't think she had any."

"She has one."

"What is it? It cannot be alarming, Lady Joan, for you are laughing."

"It is Bertram."

"Colonel Lindsay?"

"Just so. She wants him to marry."

"Why he is quite old."

Lady Joan laughed.

"My dear, he is hardly in his prime yet. Miss Lindsay wants him to marry an heiress. Then she could fulfil her idea of perfect happiness, and go and live in a Parisian boarding-house."

The gong sounded, and Lady Joan hastily retreated.

Nell felt more interest in going downstairs that afternoon than she had ever done before. For the first time since she came to the Dell she might expect to meet a friendly face in the large drawing-room, might hope for the sound of a kindly voice.

How very long ago it seemed since Melvyn Leslie formed almost a part of her daily life! Now the sight of him brought back the old days and her father.

Generally Nell cared nothing how she looked. This afternoon a strange fancy seized her that she would like to appear at her best. Very, very modest was poor Miss Adair's wardrobe; and, of course, it did not include such things as tea-gowns, but there was a soft blue sateen trimmed with dainty lace, which the doctor's daughter, when she found she had unexpectedly to go into mourning, had bestowed on her father's *protege*. It was a peculiarly pretty shade, with flowers on it of palest pink, and puffed and flounced in the latest fashion.

Nell had never meant to wear it, but some strange caprice made her take it out of her box to-day and try it on. Even then she meant to return to her more sober identity, but the blue sateen had taken long to arrange, and to her surprise it was on the point of four. The children were waiting; there was no time to take off the pretty dainty attire. After all, decided Nell, it would matter very little. No one in the room would discover whether she were dressed in black crepe or white satin.

But, oh, how pretty she looked! Such a dainty, winsome creature! The children in their red linen dresses, their short black hair, cut low on their foreheads, set off their governess's fair blonde beauty just by contrast.

Nell never dared to look round the room until she had got safely to her own particular corner and seconed herself behind the tea-tray. From this position she usually took a peep at the assembled company.

This afternoon, perhaps, the rain had kept people indoors, for she had never seen so many. Colonel Lindsay himself sat there, talking to Nell's morning visitor, and Melvyn Lindsay was on her other side.

The little tea-maker gave a sigh, and then raising the heavy silver teapot in both hands, prepared to go through her usual duty. What did it matter to her who was there, since she was among them, but not of them?

Nell was getting quite melancholy. She had poured out the fourth cup, when a voice sounded in her ear,—

"Do you like acting?"

It was Melvyn Leslie.

Wondering at the question, she just bowed her head, and then he smiled at her as he had smiled hundreds of times in the old days.

"Good child," he whispered; then aloud, "A little more cream, if you please, Miss Adair."

He contrived to pay frequent visits to the tea-table with cups or plates to be replenished, and each time he had a few words for Nell—words spoken in the old wailing tone she so well remembered, as yet spoken so as only to be heard by her.

"Well," he whispered the last time, "when can I see you? I want a long talk over the good old times? When can we have it?"

But Miss Adair never told him. When she had finished her tea-making she called her

little girls, and taking them, one in each hand, she left the drawing-room.

CHAPTER II.

AUGUST had faded into September; the Dell looked lovely in its new autumn beauty. It was still full of guests, and many of them the same whom we saw there on the afternoon when Nell donned her blue satin for the first time.

Poor little Nell! She asked herself sometimes with a little sigh whether she would not have been happier shut up always in her schoolroom than to have just the peeps at the gay world that came to her—just the half-glimpses of happiness which showed her what other girls' lives were, and filled her with a strange, listless longing.

Poor little Nell!

Mervyn Leslie had amply fulfilled his pledge. Lady Joan had charged him with the amusement of her cousin's guests, and amply had they been diverted. Picnics to some neighbouring ruin, water parties by moonlight, boating excursions, charades, dancing, and theatricals—all these had been arranged by Mervyn, and came off with great success. Even a grand amateur concert, to which the public were admitted at a startling price, proved a great attraction, and enriched a local charity by something like two hundred pounds.

In truth, the Dell had outdone itself; and there was but one verdict, namely, that it was the most delightful house in the world at which to spend a summer holiday.

But Miss Lindsay, Sir James Leslie and the Colonel were not quite so contented as the outer world. True, Lady Joan and her cousin were on the best of terms—true, they were the brightest of companions—but they obstinately gave no sign of wishing the companionship to last for life, and Priscilla grew impatient.

The Baronet, too, having once made up his mind Lady Joan was suited to become his niece, wished her to become so at once, and could not understand the extraordinary reluctance, the strange delay, which Mervyn showed in his wooing. The failure of their matchmaking then troubled Miss Lindsay and Sir James.

The Colonel's trouble lay deeper far, and, unlike the other two, he never spoke of it, but tried to banish the cloud of care which overhung his brow.

And Lady Joan!

Lady Joan felt perplexed. She had been pretty certain for a long time that Mervyn did not love her. Of late she had a shrewd suspicion he loved another; but she could not account for his conduct before his uncle.

He was her shadow—he seemed as if he had eyes and thoughts for no other. He never made any professions of love, and yet he hung upon her words.

They had been thrown a good deal together. Mervyn had been the hero and she the heroine in the theatricals. They had been to the schoolroom a great deal to practice their duets and concerted music, and there Joan had fancied she read the signs of a budding romance, and had rejoiced greatly.

"If only he is worthy of her."

But now the entertainments were mostly over; there was nothing more to consult about. Mervyn rarely entered the schoolroom; and the little governess had a strange, wistful, yearning expression in her blue eyes, making her look like a wounded deer.

"I am quite sure you are not well," said Lady Joan, meeting her one day upon the stairs, a child as usual in either hand.

"I am perfectly well, thank you, Lady Joan."

She spoke coldly; but Joan would not be repulsed.

"I think you must be feeling a little dull now all our parties are over?"

"Oh, no."

"At any rate, I am. I wish you would let me come and spend an hour with you in the schoolroom some day, Miss Adair!"

Nell softened; it was difficult to resist the charm of Lady Joan's manner.

"Some day," she answered, gently; "I shall be pleased."

"I will come directly after dinner."

"Please—when the children are in bed."

"Shall I come to-night? No?" seeing a shade pass over Nell's face. "Not to-night? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow," echoed Nell, brightly.

Lady Joan reached her own room, threw herself into a low chair, and began to think.

"There is something wrong," was her decision, after half-an-hour's cogitation. "Why does Mervyn Leslie haunt me like a shadow, and speak not a word of love? Why does that poor child avoid me, and look sad enough to melt a statue? Can he possibly be playing a double part? It looks like it. Aye, and she is going to meet him to-night; but where? Not in the schoolroom—they would neither of them venture upon that. But where?"

Lady Joan's maid delivered a message to Miss Lindsay while she was dressing.

"My lady is not very well, ma'am; she will rest in her own room instead of coming down to dinner."

Priscilla, rather annoyed, accepted the apology; she little knew what had given Joan her taste for solitude. She had not noticed that afternoon at tea Mervyn Leslie had remarked it would be a rough night, and for his part he pitied anyone who ventured down the grounds by the boathouse.

Joan had brooded and brooded over those words, until at last their true meaning came home to her. Mervyn was Miss Adair's lover, and he wanted a secret meeting with her; he knew no better way of making the appointment than this strange one. He had even volunteered the statement—the wind would be highest and most disagreeable at half-past eight.

Joan Carisbrooke had nothing mean or contemptible in her nature, and yet for once she meant to play the spy.

She would know whether Mervyn Leslie was wooing this pretty, friendless girl to her ruin; and the knowledge once gained she would first save Nell from him, and then bury the secret for ever in her bosom.

It was a horrid night; a turbulent east wind made the trees shake in every bough, and whistle through their leaves in a very ghostly fashion.

Joan trembled just a little, but she was not to be driven from her purpose. She dressed herself in a short black serge skirt, and fastened a small straw hat securely on her head; then she wrapped herself warmly in a new fur-lined cloak, and went out just as the clock was striking eight.

She knew every corner of the grounds. In spite of the roaring wind she soon found herself at the boathouse, which stood close to the banks of an ornamental lake lately made by Colonel Lindsay at a great expense.

Joan slipped behind a drooping willow tree as she saw standing by the water's edge the girl of whom her thoughts were full.

"Poor little Nell! you would have been better far in your lonely schoolroom," she thought, pitifully. "Mervyn Leslie's love and admiration can bring you little good; he is too selfish to give up one atom of his own comfort for your sake."

She looked so pretty, so childlike, standing there—the little schoolroom maid—a heavy crimson shawl wrapped over her head and shoulders almost concealing the folds of her white dress as she stood, with strained eye and listening ear, waiting.

Waiting, and for what? Joan Carisbrooke had no need to ask. She seemed perfectly certain of Nell's errand, and for whom she was watching. The watching did not last long.

Five minutes at the most, and a tall dark figure approached. It was Mr. Leslie's. He

tossed away the end of the cigar he had been smoking, and went straight up to Nell.

It was the first time in her life Joan Carisbrooke had ever played the part of eaves-dropper; and though she knew her intentions were good—although she knew only pity for little Nell brought her there—she felt ill at ease.

They were so near her she could have put out her hand and touched Nell's crimson shawl—so near that, in spite of the howling wind, she caught every word they said.

"What's the matter, Nell?"

It was a lover's wooing tone. It had all a lover's tenderness; but yet it lacked something—there was no ray of truth or candour about it.

"Nothing," whispered Nell, trustfully; "nothing, now you have come."

"I wish I could be with you always. I wish, oh! Nell, I wish from the bottom of my heart the old happy time could come over again, and we two be happy."

"I am happy."

He stroked her soft hair caressingly.

"I shall never forget the Dell, little one, and the happy meetings we have had here. They will haunt me when I go away like the memory of some sad, beautiful dream."

Lady Joan knew that despair had entered Nell's heart then—knew by the very tone of her voice as she repeated almost mechanically those two words,—

"Going away?"

"I must, childie."

"Go away and leave me?"

"Be reasonable, Nell. I have been here five weeks—I was invited for a fortnight. Don't you think I have prolonged my visit as much as possible?"

"But when shall you come back?"

He did not answer—perhaps he could not, with those clear eyes looking so trustfully into his.

"You will come back?" repeated Nell. "Oh, Mervyn! are you trying to frighten me?"

"I shall come back some day, but—"

He hesitated.

Lady Joan could hear Nell's sobs. My lady would dearly like to have been a man just for one half-hour, to have had the pleasure of knocking Leslie down.

"Why do you make my task harder?" asked Mervyn, impatiently. "Child, you must know the truth as well as I do. Why make me repeat it?"

"What truth?"

His voice softened.

"I love you, child! you know that. I am not a good man, little one, I never was; but if ever I knew what love meant I love you!"

"And yet you are going away."

"Can I help it? Little Nell, my love can do you no good; I ought to have gone weeks ago; I ought never to have won your heart. I can never marry you, Nell!"

You might have heard a pin fall in the darkness as the two stood there.

Joan clenched her fist in an impotent rage as she listened.

"I am my uncle's heir," went on Mervyn, "but I am completely at his mercy. He cannot prevent my being a baronet at his death, but he might leave his whole fortune away from me."

"And you think—"

"I know that the day I married without his consent he would out off my allowance. I should have nothing to keep a wife on; so you see, Nell, I am acting unselfishly in leaving you."

Unselfishly, when he left her with a heart-ache it would take time, perhaps eternity, to cure!

"How long have you known this?"

"Always."

"And yet—"

"And yet I loved you. Ah! Nell! how could I go away; it was sweet to win your love. I hoped against hope that something

would happen to free me from my uncle's tyranny, I loved you so!"

"Love!" Ah! How the child's voice thrilled with scorn.

"You call that love?"

"No one suspects," went on Leslie; "no one at the Dell has the least idea of our little romance. It has been very pleasant while it lasted, sweet; now it must be over. I must return to the workaday world, and give my hand to an heiress. You—"

"And I! What shall I do?"

"You are such a pretty little thing, Nell, you are sure to marry some day, and—"

She interrupted him.

"Are you quite heartless!" she cried, passionately, "or do you think my love as worthless as your own! My father trusted you, he gloried in your talents, and you have blighted the life of his only child! You knew you could never marry me; you knew you were only trifling with me, and yet you won my heart for the plaything of an hour!"

"I have had enough of your reproaches," said Mervyn, heartlessly. "You must have known our courtship was nothing but child's play, a mere pastoral."

"Why?"

"Because, in our rank, a man never marries beneath him, unless he is his own master. Do you think, if I had been serious, Nell, I should have met you by stealth like this, instead of paying my addresses at the Dell?"

"And this is the man I thought a hero, a prince!" murmured poor Nell. "This heartless, faithless gentleman is my poor father's old pupil!"

Perhaps Mervyn felt he had gone too far, perhaps he was the least bit ashamed.

"There's no occasion to take on so," he said, coarsely, "no one knows about it; you're just as well off as you were six weeks ago, when I met you in the shrubbery-grounds. You have lost neither home, esteem, or friends through me. We have had some pleasant times together, and now we must part."

"Part!" echoed the girl, fiercely. "Part! with the prayer that I may never see your cruel, false face again! You have deceived me enough. I see it all now, the whole truth. You won my love for a plaything, and then trampled it under your feet. But, at least, you have let me know you as you are. My heart will not break for you; it was an ideal I loved which never existed. Mr. Leslie, you have cured me of my infatuation. Standing here in God's beautiful moonlight, with no one to hear me but Heaven, I can be thankful for my lack of fortune, since it has saved me from the misery of passing my life at your side. Poor, friendless as I am, there is yet one woman in the world infinitely more to be pitied—she who in the future shall have the wretchedness to call herself your wife!"

He cowered beneath her gaze.

"Hard words hurt nobody."

"Blows do, however."

The words were spoken in a cold, wrathful tone; the next moment Mervyn Leslie was sprawling on the ground, and Nell found her hand drawn through Colonel Lindsay's arm as he began to walk with her towards the house.

"Hush!" he said, gently, when she would have spoken; "wait until we are at home."

He took her in through the private entrance (of which he alone possessed the key), leading to his library.

He fastened the door, and drew a low chair to the fire, then, taking off her crimson shawl, he made her sit down, and fondly clasped the ice-cold hands in his, much as though she had been one of his little daughters.

The awful loneliness, the piteous sense of desolation, seemed to fade away very soon; Nell was sobbing like a little child.

Colonel Lindsay watched her for a few minutes, then he said, gently,—

"I heard it all. Leslie behaved like a villain. He ought never to have come here, but my sister is so infatuated with him. I can promise you one thing, Miss Adair, he shall never darken these doors again."

"You heard what he said?"

"I heard everything! My poor child!" and the soldier's voice grew tender, "what have we been about to let you fall into such a wretch's hand?"

"You see, I knew him long ago."

"Long ago! Before you came here?"

Bit by bit she told her little story.

Bertram Lindsay understood it all then; how this man had seemed a wave of her once home-life wafted back to her from that home's wreck. He felt pretty sure, from first to last, the child had welcomed Mervyn Leslie more for the sake of the past.

"Shall I tell you something, Miss Adair?"

She answered timidly,—

"If you please."

"I think you have never cared for Leslie at all."

"I don't care for him now," said Nell, stoutly; "only I feel as if nobody could ever be good or true."

"You welcomed him as your old friend; you were thrown on him for love and sympathy, till you fancied you really cared for him. Miss Adair, he has behaved shamefully to you. But you are spared one pang; he may have spoilt the memories of your childhood, he may have destroyed your face, but he has not broken your heart. Some day that heart will turn to a better, worthier man, and you will know then that what you feel for Leslie has never been love at all."

"I wish there was no such thing as love in the world!" said Nell, a little wearily. "Colonel Lindsay, what shall you do? Shall you send me away?"

"Send you away?"

"It would be the proper thing, I suppose. I have broken the rules of polite society, I have walked about your grounds clandestinely with a lover, I have tried to entrap one of your guests."

"Don't talk like that," he said, quickly, "I cannot bear to hear you!"

"Shall you send me away?"

"If you had a home where parents would pet you, and brothers and sisters make much of you, if you had a mother to comfort you, I would send you away, certainly, and see if a month of home-life would not restore the smiles my little ones so love to see."

"You don't understand," said Nell, bluntly; "I meant, should you send me away in disgrace without a character? You know."

"Do you think me capable of it?"

Nell buried her face in her hands and said she didn't know, then she began to cry again.

"I shall never send you away while you wish to stay," said the Colonel, simply; "my children love you, and I am pleased they should have one so true and innocent about them. While we have a home, Miss Adair, I trust you will share it, unless," and he smiled gravely, "some good and true man offers you another home which would be all your own."

Nell disregarded the last suggestion valiantly.

"You say while you have a home," she repeated, a little reprovingly; "that's as good as inviting me to stay here for ever; the Dell is your very own."

"Yes," and Colonel Lindsay replied heavily, "my very own. I sometimes wish it had not been!"

"Why?"

"I might have been more careful of it, Miss Adair. Believe me, there are other troubles as hard to bear as yours!"

"I always thought you so happy and fortunate!" said Nell, captiously.

"And I have troubles so heavy I wonder sometimes how I can bear them. I am a man walking blindfold on the edge of a precipice, Miss Adair."

Nell looked up wistfully.

"I wish I could help you, Colonel Lindsay!"

"You can help me by your sympathy," he said, cheerfully, thinking it the best thing in the world for her to detract her from her own grief.

"How?"

"You must promise not to tell anyone," he replied, gravely. "Can I trust you, Miss Adair?"

"Yes," she answered, very gently.

"The world thinks me a rich man. My late wife's property was invested in a company. Had that company succeeded I should have been fabulously rich. Last week it stopped payment."

Nell started.

"But what will you do?"

"I don't know. In a day or two the Dell will be empty of its guests, then I shall collect what ready money I can, defray all claims, let this dear old place, and go and live somewhere in retirement with my dear little girls."

Nell's voice broke.

"And shall you be quite poor?"

"So poor that I shall have to take some appointment to make both ends meet; but, Miss Adair, so that there is enough for the creditors I don't mind. I think it would kill me if it were in the power of any living creature to trace their misery or ruin to me."

Nell still looked wonderstruck.

"I have told no one in the world but you," said Bertram, earnestly. "I expect my sister will leave me. Happily, the children are too young to understand what poverty means. Do you think you can bring yourself to stay with us, Miss Adair?"

And Nell raised her blue eyes to his face as she answered,—

"I will never go away unless you send me!"

It was wonderful, as she went back to her schoolroom, how little she thought about Mervyn Leslie and his perfidy; all her love affair seemed to have faded from her mind, which was full of Colonel Lindsay, and the brave, hopeful way in which he had told her of his ruin.

Nell went to sleep that night to dream that she was a fairy queen, and the first use she made of her sovereignty was to restore the master of the Dell to his kingdom.

It was quite late when she awoke—so late that nurse, who specially favoured Miss Adair, had given the children their breakfast, and sent them out for a walk.

Nurse herself appeared at Nell's bedside with a very tempting tray of tea and toast; not until she had seen it satisfactorily disposed of did she say in a strange, uneasy sort of voice,—

"You weren't expecting any bad news, were you, Miss Adair?"

Nell shook her head.

"I never expect news at all, nurse. I haven't had a single letter since I first came here."

Nurse knew that, but she meant to be wary, and spare her favourite a sudden shock if she could.

"And none of your people were ill when you left home, my dear miss?"

"I haven't a relation in the world, nurse!"

Nurse saw further precaution was needless, and took a yellow envelope from the pocket of her dress.

"It's just come, Miss Adair; and as people don't send telegrams for nothing, I thought I'd better give it you myself."

Nell stretched out her hand languidly for the despatch. It really did not seem to her possible for it to be very interesting.

One moment's glance and she saw it was from Dr. Ward, the kind old man who had procured her her present easeful position; the message was short and imperative,—

"I want particularly to see you. Come to London to-day if possible. I will see that you return to-morrow."

Nell imparted this message to nurse, who energetically assisted her with her toilet, and declared there was no manner of difficulty about her going. Lady Joan Cranbrook was going to London by the eleven o'clock train; of course she would be delighted to have Miss Adair with her.

Miss Adair felt more diffident, and went rather nervously to the drawing-room to con-

sult Miss Lindsay; to her surprise the Colonel was there.

"Of course you can spare Miss Adair," he said, when Priscilla hesitated. "Ward is not the kind of man to send for her needlessly. She will be able to go with Lady Joan. By the way, Miss Adair, do not think of hurrying back; to-morrow, Saturday, will do perfectly well for the children."

He held open the door for her to pass, then when he had followed her, he said, gravely,—

"Mr. Leslie left this morning. I am sure, Miss Adair, this change will do you good. I regard the Doctor's letter as quite providential."

To his amazement, the girl clung to him with a little, gasping sob,—

"Colonel Lindsay!"

"What is the matter? What is it? Don't be afraid. Surely you know I will do my best for you?"

"It isn't that, Colonel Lindsay," and her face grew pink with eagerness. "This doesn't change anything, does it? You'll have me back?"

He laughed.

"What! you suspect me of sending a post-card after you to say we can no longer afford the pleasure of your services. For shame, child! you should know me better. Make haste and see to your packing."

But Nell only carried a very small hand-bag. Lady Joan greeted her kindly, almost affectionately.

"I was coming to tell you I could not have that chat in the schoolroom to-night, and then I heard we were to be fellow-travellers."

"You are leaving very sudden?"

"Very," and Joan leant back in her corner.

"Miss Adair, I am so very happy."

Poor Nell grew a little white; she knew quite well Lady Joan was Mervyn's destined bride, but she could not bear to hear of her engagement.

"I think I can guess," she said, hoarsely; "you are going to be married?"

"Precisely."

"I hope you will be very happy."

"I think so. I have loved him all my life, but we only settled it last night."

"Only last night!"

"I never thought he cared for me—he always seemed making plans for my marrying other people. I am going to London to tell my guardian."

"And you expect his approval?"

"I expect he will think the disparity rather great; there are more than twenty years between us."

Nell fairly gasped.

"More than twenty years!"

"Aye, Sir James is nearly fifty; I am twenty-five, but I have always loved him. I would have married him any time these eight years if only he had asked me."

"And he never did?"

"Never till last night; he always seemed to treat me as a nun. Last night I told him plainly I would not marry Mervyn if he were the last man left; and then Sir James looked so wretched that I asked him if there were no other relationship possible between us. I suggested that he should adopt me as a daughter, but he said he should lose me. I told him I never, never meant to marry any one—and at last we settled matters."

"And you are happy?"

"Perfectly."

"I like Sir James."

"He is a darling. Miss Adair, we have talked long enough about my affairs; what is taking you to London in such a desperate hurry?"

"I am going to see an old friend; he sent for me this morning."

"And you have no idea for what he wants you?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Don't you feel curious?"

"Not very."

But when her modest cab drew up at Dr. Ward's house on Buxton Hall, Nell owned to

herself she did feel just a little envious. The doctor's old housekeeper, who knew Nell well, made much of her, and in a very few moments the kind old doctor came bustling in.

"Not a word about business until you've had your dinner, then you shall come and sit in my study, with your toes near the fire, when I will tell you a piece of news."

"This programme was pretty well carried out, only the news was so long in coming that Nell waxed impatient."

"When there is bad news coming I always like to hear it straight out," she observed, reprovingly.

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't know any bad news to tell you, so I'm afraid I can't oblige you."

"Well, we'll come to business. Did you ever hear the name of Higgins?"

"Higgins!"

"Precisely—Isabella Higgins?"

"Yes, but I've no idea where. Oh, yes, I recollect now; it was in the summer at that horrid crossing near the Fisheries I helped some funny old woman over the road, and she would know my name and address, because, she said, 'Bet Higgins never was ungrateful.' I had forgotten it entirely."

"But you gave your name and address?"

"I gave my name and your address. I was not quite sure of the name of Colonel Lindsay's country house then, and you had told me I might have letters sent here."

"I know. Well, a week ago two letters came, one to you, the other to myself; they were both in the same handwriting, and I waited until I had read mine and gathered all particulars before I sent for you."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Higgins really wrote to you and to me?"

"No. Your letter may be from her, it doubtless is; in fact, my correspondent told me they merely directed it. My letter was written by a worthy firm of solicitors of the Inner Temple, who had acted for years as Mrs. Higgins's advisers."

No gleam of the truth came to Nell.

"But what had they to do with us?"

"They announced the fact of Mrs. Higgins's death, and the fact that she had left the whole of her property to me in trust for Miss Ellen Adair, the only person—so ran the will—who had ever offered her a voluntary act of kindness."

The tears stood in Nell's eyes.

"Poor woman! Fancy her being so grateful for so little!"

"Poor woman! You don't know how rich she was. Come, Nell, aren't you anxious to know the extent of your good fortune?"

"Has she left me a thousand pounds?"

Dr. Ward laughed.

"She has left you all she had, and it is no mean all. The solicitors cannot speak positively, because she was so fond of secreting money, and there may be more put away of which they know nothing; but judging from their information your income will be something like forty thousand pounds a-year."

Nell gasped.

"Do you mean it?"

"That's the very lowest figure. There is no house, no estate, no furniture—Mrs. Higgins never settled down—a quantity of jewels and some rare old lace, otherwise the property is all in hard cash. If you marry the capital is to revert to your children after your death; so you see you can only spend the interest, but forty thousand a-year is quite sufficient for a young lady to make ducks and drakes of."

Nell was having a good cry. The kind old Doctor stared.

"My dear, you've every right to the money. The poor soul had not a relation in the world. Why shouldn't she leave her fortune to the only person who did her a kindness?"

"Dr. Ward, will you promise not to tell anyone?"

Dr. Ward thought Nell's head a little turned.

"My dear child, why?"

"They'd make me leave the Lindsays."

"Of course you must leave them. You must have a town house and a place in the country. Then I shall get you a chaperone. You'll have to be presented to the Queen next season."

Nell threw up her hands.

"It'll be horrid!"

"Nonsense."

"Dr. Ward!"

There was no resisting that tone; no resisting Nell's blue eyes when they were full of tears.

"What is it, child?"

"I am very happy at Bournemouth." Here her voice broke.

"Yes, yes; but you'll be happier in a house of your own."

"No, no; and it is a secret, but I can trust you. Colonel Lindsay has lost all his money!"

The Doctor whistled.

"He will be as poor as ever he can be. Perhaps he won't be able to afford a governess at all. Now, Dr. Ward, I must stay with the children."

"Lindsay will be the first to see the unsuitability of the thing when he hears—"

"But he won't hear it unless you are horribly unkind," sobbed Nell. "I want no one to know. Dr. Ward, let me keep my secret just six months?"

"But why?"

Nell blushed.

"If ever I am married," she said, wickedly, "I would like to be married just for myself. Let me go on being poor just six months longer?"

"You'd charm anyone into letting you have your way, Nell," said the Doctor. "What do you propose?"

"To go back to the Dell on Saturday; the next two days I shall spend in buying pretty things if you and the lawyers will let me; then I'll go back and be a governess again."

"Till when?"

She blushed.

"Till next Easter."

"And then?"

"Then I suppose I must be a horrid, stuck-up, purse-proud young woman."

"Nonsense! And you don't mean to say you want to go straight back to Bournemouth and go on teaching just as though Mrs. Higgins hadn't left you the value of a brass farthing?"

Nell looked doubtful.

"I don't think I meant quite that; I think I will tell the Colonel and Miss Lindsay I have had a legacy left me, and then if things went very bad with him, perhaps he'd let me stay on without any salary."

Dr. Ward looked at Nell through his silver-rimmed spectacles. He was a widower; wife and children had gone on before him to a better country, but he had not quite forgotten the romance of his youth. Old and grey-headed as he was, he understood his charge better than she understood herself. It seemed to him that Nell dreaded nothing so much as a separation from Bertram Lindsay.

"He is a good man," reflected the Doctor, who had known Bertram from his boyhood; "but he is years and years older than she is, and people say his heart is buried in his wife's grave. My little Nell is fair enough to win an honest man's first love."

He said nothing more that night, until Nell had taken her candle and was preparing to leave him, then he turned to her with a fatherly smile,—

"I think you must have your way, my dear."

"Really! You promise?"

"I promise to allow you to pass yourself off as a needy spinster until next Easter; after that, Nell, you must be sensible and take possession of your fairy fortune."

Nell blushed.

"I should like a little of it now," said Nell, unselfishly. "Just a little to buy pretty things."

The old doctor laughed.

"I will give you a cheque to-morrow. You had better take my old housekeeper with you; you mustn't go running about London alone now you are an heiress."

Nell shrugged her shoulders and consented.

Oh! the wonders bought with that first cheque! The pretty half-mourning wardrobe,—for Nell had a fancy she should like to wear some token of regret for her benefactress—the countless little trifles, which, to a young girl mean so much; the books and new music, the flowers, and many-buttoned gloves!

Mrs. Smith looked on well pleased.

"You'll want a box to take all those things to Hampshire, Miss Adair?" she suggested, prudently.

The box was purchased, a handsome present for Mrs. Smith was chosen, and yet there remained quite a pile of golden sovereigns in Nell's purse.

"And you have enjoyed it; you don't mind being a proud, stuck-up, rich young person, eh, Nell?" laughed the Doctor, when he heard of the shopping.

Nell made some absent answer; clearly her mind was running on other things.

"Dr. Ward."

"What is it, child?"

But she had a strange hesitation in speaking. The kind old man laid one hand upon her head.

"Try to think it is your father standing here, Nell; speak to me as freely as if I were in his place."

Nell struggled with her tears.

"It seems so hard that I should be so rich and not want money, and other people be so poor."

"Does it? But you can't despoil yourself, child; the principal you must keep. The interest, to be sure, you might give away, but it would be foolish, dear. The money is yours, and you ought to enjoy it."

The girl had a queer little twinge in her throat.

"Colonel Lindsay will be poor," she went on, "until he can settle his affairs and turn round. He may have to let the Dell. Couldn't you lend him money, Dr. Ward? I mean couldn't you give him some of mine, and not let him know anything about it?"

Dr. Ward shook his head.

"I'm afraid not, pussy."

"But—"

"I tell you what, Nell, to-morrow we will go to the bank, and we will see what money stands there in your name, and then we will talk together about things."

But even Dr. Ward was astonished when he and his protégé interviewed the bankers. Mrs. Higgins had never spent the whole of her income; besides that almost fabulous yearly sum, about two hundred thousand pounds was in funded property at Nell's free disposal.

She looked at Dr. Ward as they drove homewards. He smiled.

"You must do nothing rashly, Nell. I think I know all that is in your mind, and I promise you I will do my best to aid you. Leave me one blank cheque, signed Ellen Adair, and I will see to business matters for you, little heiress."

It seemed months since Nell had left Bournemouth when she returned there. The children hung about her, telling her how they had missed her; nurse came to offer her welcome—it was more like coming home than returning to a situation.

"But there have been sad doings since you left, Miss Adair, short as the time is," said Nurse, when she attended Nell to her own room, and the children ran to the nursery to be dressed for tea; "there's not a creature in the house but the servants and the master. Miss Lindsay's gone, every guest has gone. It's just as rats desert a sinking ship—false friends go at the first breath of trouble."

"But what is the trouble, nurse?"

Nurse told her in substance much the story she had already heard from the Colonel. It

appeared, however, on reflection, the Dell was to be sold—the ruin was even more complete than Bertram had feared—the estate disposed of, his debts paid in full. There would be sufficient money to establish the Colonel and his children in some modest suburban home, and he would at once seek an appointment as secretary or correspondent, for which his talents were well qualified.

Nurse cried bitterly as she told this story to Miss Adair. She had been in the family ever since the Colonel's mother came home a bride, and she cared for their interests as her own.

"It will half kill the master, Miss Adair! Him that's been used to a free open country life, and to be his own master, with no one to say him nay. And the dear little ladies, what is to become of them?"

"They are so young," said Nell, gently. "The blow will hardly tell on them so hardly."

"But they'll grow bolder, Miss Adair," said Nurse, who was inclined to despond; "and they've no mother to see after them. It's a thousand pities the master couldn't fancy Lady Joan. She loves the children dearly, and would have stood by him in his troubles; besides, she's a pretty fortune of her own, and now she's to marry Sir James Leslie, who's more money than he knows what to do with."

Nell smiled a little wistfully.

"I don't think Colonel Lindsay is a marrying man."

"Indeed, you're mistaken, miss," returned Nurse. "The master's just fitted for home life. Give him a good wife, and he'd never wish to stir from his own fireside."

Nell was dressed at last. A soft, black grenadine, trimmed with lace; jet ornaments, a handsome sash, and some soft white tulle at her throat. Nurse looked on admiringly.

"Black suits you wonderfully, Miss Adair; but I do hope you have not lost anyone that's near to you."

"Oh, no," answered Nell, promptly. "I found a friend of mine had died and left me all she had. I had never been at all intimate with her; but, somehow, it seemed to me I ought to wear black, as she had thought of me so kindly."

"And I am sure I congratulate you heartily, miss," returned Nurse. "If it's but twenty pounds a-year it's nice to have a little provision for a rainy day."

Nell smiled, and went back to the school-room.

Maude and Violet were on either side of the hearthrug, and between them no less a person than the master of the house.

"Papa's come to tea!" announced the twins, in their clear treble; "and, Miss Adair, he invited himself."

"I hope you do not mind?"

"Oh, no!" but there was a break in her voice. She felt so much for this man's sorrows she could hardly speak to him quite calmly.

He took in the black dress just as nurse had done.

"I fear you have had bad news?"

"Hardly that. Someone who was very kind to me is dead. I had only seen her once, but she remembered me in her will, and Dr. Ward wanted to tell me about it."

"I am very glad. You look too frail and delicate to face poverty, Miss Adair."

"I am not at all delicate," said Nell, stoutly, "and I was never very much afraid of poverty. I think a hundred a-year of my very, very own was the greatest wealth I ever longed for."

He smiled.

"You are not ambitious?"

"Oh, no."

"And may I ask if your desires are realised? Does the legacy agree with the scene you dreamed of?"

She shook her head.

"No; but it is quite sufficient to keep me comfortably. I need never bother about money again."

The children were intent on strawberry-jam. Nell and their father were practically alone.

"And I must begin to bother about it now for the first time in my life."

She smiled wistfully.

"You do not look unhappy."

"No; I don't think wealth ever brought me any special pleasure. If I could keep the Dell I should be quite contented; it is parting from my home which is the keenest pang of all."

"But you will not go yet?"

"As soon as the Dell can find a purchaser I shall remove; I am anxious to be in London and seeking some position. I have the little ones to think of, you know," smiling at them.

"They are too small to feel the loss."

He sighed.

"I fear they will feel it, poor little things! Think of the caresses and endearments lavished on them by their aunt and her guests! In six weeks' time, poor children, they will have ceased to be objects of interest to anyone."

Nell's eyes filled with tears.

"You are unkind to speak so bitterly!"

"Am I? I have not quite recovered from the shock it was to see my guests speed away. The paper with the news of my misfortune had not been at the Dell three hours before everyone remembered they were specially wanted at home."

"Not Lady Joan!"

He softened.

"Lady Joan had left before. I had a letter from her like herself, tender, kind, and true. She reminded me that, on their mother's side, she was the next-of-kin to my little girls, and urged my leaving them with her if I felt disposed to go abroad. She was freshly engaged to the man of her choice; it said much for her unselfishness that she could find time to think of the twins."

"I like Lady Joan!"

"So do I. But I had not expected you to share the feeling."

"Why not?"

"Because," he stopped, "it is a painful thing to say; you surely know that Lady Joan was the destined wife of—" he stopped, "Mervyn Leslie!"

"I know."

"And yet you liked her."

Nell blushed.

"I liked her so much that I rejoiced when I heard she was to be spared from such a fate."

Bertram looked into her deep blue eyes.

"Are you beginning to think I was right?"

"How?"

"In telling you Mr. Leslie had never really won your love at all—that your feeling for him was nothing in the world but a girl's liking?"

Nell was blushing frantically.

"You were quite right!"

The fascinations of strawberry-jam having now almost lost their charm, Maude and Violet made good their claim to join in the conversation.

It was a very pleasant meal, the pleasantest Nell ever recollected at the Dell.

She need to look back upon the months that followed with bewilderment, that she never guessed what made their charm. Most of the servants had been dismissed, the carriages were sold, the horses departed; nurse with a cook and housemaid, and a single page, waited on the little family. Nell and the children took their meals downstairs with Colonel Lindsay; the twins went to bed at eight, and then their governess asked to retire to the schoolroom. With a kind of delicacy, lest their father should think her intruding on his solitude, she used to spend the time until she went to bed playing and singing. The schoolroom was so far from the library, for a long time she fancied her performance could not be heard; but one night some sound startled her, and she rose from the piano and opened the door suddenly, to find Colonel Lindsay walking up and down the corridor smoking a cigar.

"I beg your pardon," she said, blushing, "I am afraid I have disturbed you?"

"Nay, it is I who am trespassing; but I am fond of music, and you cannot understand the dreariness of those large empty rooms downstairs."

"The children will be able to play to you when they are older," said Nell, consolingly; "they are both fond of music, especially Maude."

He smiled.

"I shall have to wait some years, I fear. It used to be my ideal of a home life—a pleasant, tranquil evening, with sweet music like yours."

Nell wondered whether Lady Mary had been musical, and longed to ask the question. It was needless; he went on of his own accord.

"But like so many ideals, mine has never been realised. Lady Mary was too fond of society; we rarely spent an evening in our own home."

"She has been dead three years," said Nell, half-dreamily. "Do the children remember her at all?"

He shook his head.

"I should say not; they saw very little of her the latter months of her life. She suffered from nervous restlessness, and could not bear them in the same room with her."

"How hard for her to know she was ill, and yet to be deprived of her children's company?"

"I don't think that was a source of regret to her—she never cared for children."

"But her own?"

"Her own less than all. She could never forgive the little girls for having disappointed her of a son."

She said no more of his wife. He had come into the schoolroom while they were talking, and now he turned to Nell appealingly.

"I wish you would sing again?"

She sat down and sang the "Land of the Leal." Colonel Lindsay had Scottish blood in his veins, and dearly loved the ballads of his native land. His eyes were not quite dry when Nell had finished.

"Ah, Miss Adair, that is what married life ought to be—the loving one another so dearly that even Heaven would not be precious without the hope of reunion there. But that is not what girls marry for nowadays. A fine house, a fashionable wedding, society, operas, balls—that is what they look out for."

"Not always," said Nell, simply. "I think there is just as much love in the world now as there used to be."

He had left the room before she looked up. After that it grew to be almost a custom with him to come in for half-an-hour in the evenings when she was singing, and by degrees Nell learned to look forward to that one half-hour, and deem it the brightest of the day.

And so the time passed on. No purchaser came forward to buy the Dell, and a strange shadow crept over Colonel Lindsay's face as the dull November days began and he was as far as ever from having settled his affairs, and begun the world afresh in his new character of a ruined man.

"This will never do," he said to Nell, impatiently, one morning at breakfast, throwing down a letter; "here's my lawyer asking me what price I want for the Dell. He ought to know I'd be thankful to get rid of it at any terms. It's folly to lose the chance of a good purchaser by haggling about terms, especially at this time of year. I left it in his hands; he knows quite well I only want the matter settled."

Miss Adair very rarely expressed an opinion on business matters, but to-day she varied her custom.

"I think it would be fairer to Mr. Hill if you set a price on the place. You must know its value far better than he can do."

"It's not a question of value, but of what it can be made to produce."

Nell spread bread-and-butter for the children with the utmost diligence.

"If I were you," she said slowly, looking

up from that interesting pastime, "I should write and give Mr. Hill three prices—what you consider it worth, what would satisfy you, and the lowest figure at which you would part with it."

Colonel Lindsay looked relieved.

"Really, Miss Adair, that is a good idea. The estate is well worth thirty thousand pounds, but as things are now, and the distressing need I have for ready money, I should be satisfied with twenty; but he mustn't let it go a penny under fifteen."

"I should write and say so."

She had the satisfaction of posting the letter an hour later with her own hand. She also slipped another into the letter-box at the same time, penned by herself, and which concerned the fate of Colonel Lindsay's estate quite as nearly as did his own note.

Nell went down on the morning of the next day but one to breakfast, and found Colonel Lindsay rather unnerved with his letters. She sat down, as she believed, unnoticed. But no, he looked up.

"Ah! I have good news now—news they are too young to understand. But you will sympathise with me. The Dell is sold."

"Sold!"

"Aye. I never expected to speak exultingly of what gives my birthplace to a stranger; but it will be something to stand erect, like Longfellow's village blacksmith, and 'look the world in the face, for I owe not any man.' Miss Adair, I feel ten years younger since I had this letter."

"I am so very glad."

"I knew you would be; and the price is good—far beyond my expectations. Thirty thousand pounds. It will clear my debts, and settle a small sum on the children, lest I should"—here his voice faltered—"come to grief in foreign parts."

Foreign parts! Nell looked up bewildered.

"I have received an offer of a post abroad—five hundred pounds a-year. It is so far beyond what I can hope for in England that I have resolved to accept it."

"The children!" breathed Nell. "It will break their hearts! Surely you cannot leave them?"

"I cannot take them."

"But—"

"They are so young, they will get over it."

Nell felt, a little bitterly, youth could not do all things. She was so young, and yet she knew full well she should never get over the parting with Colonel Lindsay.

"They have no mother," she pleaded—"no near relation. You are all they have."

"And do you think it costs me nothing to leave them? I feel as if I were shutting myself out of Paradise. In spite of ruin these last weeks have been the happiest of my life."

He left the room hurriedly, almost as if he had been betrayed into saying more than he intended.

Nell turned to the table. There were two letters. Half-mechanically she took them up, and slipped away to the seclusion of her own room.

The first she had expected. It was from Dr. Ward, and told her what she had surmised—that she was now the legal owner of the Dell.

The Doctor added he had heard a foreign appointment would shortly be offered to Colonel Lindsay, and he trusted that officer would accept it. "Then, my dear child," concluded Nell's guardian, "you must leave the lowly position you now occupy, and take up the burden of riches given you to bear. There are reasons which have made me bitterly regret my promise to allow your disguise to continue till Easter; but I trust Colonel Lindsay will go abroad, and you will then be ready to absolve me from the time which yet remains of my promised secrecy."

Nell shook her head, and then she took up the other letter.

The writing was unknown to her, but the

signature was Joan Leslie; so evidently Sir James had objected to a long engagement.

"My DEAR MISS ADAIR,—We are spending our honeymoon in this neighbourhood, and we want to come over to the Dell. If my husband writes to Colonel Lindsay he will decline to receive us—he has refused to receive a single old friend since his troubles began—so I write to you to say we mean to call to-morrow about eleven. We shall ask for you; but I hope you will manage for Sir James to have a brief interview with my cousin before we leave; he has something very important to communicate to him."

"For my own part, it will be a real pleasure to me to renew our acquaintance, and I hope you will believe me, your sincere friend,

"JOAN LESLIE."

Nell put the letter away; she did not want to see the Leslies, and yet she felt sure their coming was dictated by kindness; every line showed her that. Of course she must grant Lady Joan's request, only she hardly understood how.

Colonel Lindsay saved her the trouble of devising a method.

"I want you and the children to walk with me this morning," he said, meeting her on the stairs. "When can you be ready?"

"Will half-past eleven do?"

"Admirably! I will come to the schoolroom."

There was nothing more for Nell to do but request her visitors might be shown straight to the schoolroom; then, weary both in head and heart, she gave the twins a holiday, and, stretching herself on the schoolroom sofa, she tried hard to look into the future which seemed so strange and dreary.

The bride and bridegroom were punctual to a moment.

Four weeks' matrimony had converted Lady Joan into the most charming matron.

Without the smallest ceremony she retreated with Nell to the latter's own room, leaving Sir James on the watch for the Colonel.

Alone, the two, who might once have been termed rivals, looked straight into each other's eyes and understood that they were friends.

Lady Joan stooped and kissed Nell on the forehead.

"My dear, you have behaved nobly. You have saved my cousin from desperation."

"I?" said Nell, in amazement. "I have done nothing in the world, Lady Joan."

"You have been more faithful to Bertram than his own kindred. You have clung to him when his own sister deserted him; you have stayed in a dull country house through a dreary winter with only two little children and a gloomy disappointed man for companions; do you call that nothing?"

"I liked it," said Nell, and blushed rosy red the next minute. "It seemed so terrible for your cousin, Lady Joan; I liked to do what I could to comfort him."

Lady Joan made Nell sit down beside her on the sofa, and put one arm round the girl's supple waist.

"Dear," she said, tenderly, "will you try and look on me as an elder sister? Will you promise to believe I say this for your sake, and yours only?"

"Yes," breathed Nell, faintly, with a strange fear of what she was going to hear.

"Nell," went on Lady Joan, "this is a cruel, bad world, and when people are wicked themselves they are apt to impute wrong motives to others. Nell, dear, you must come home with me. I cannot leave you here!"

"But—"

"But Miss Lindsay—ashamed, perhaps, of her own baseness in deserting Bertram—is spreading a cruel slander. She says, Nell, you stay here not for Maude or Violet's sakes, but for their father's."

The two little hands went up to screen Nell's burning blushes. Lady Joan hurried on.

"Now," said the four weeks' wife, "you will take my advice, Nell—we will silence this

cruel slander. We will show the world how sweet and true you are, and we will do all this without Bertram even suspecting a word of what I have told you."

"But how?"

"Nothing easier. To-morrow the Dell will be filled with inventory-makers, packers, and the like. It will be no place for a lady and children. You and the girls must return with us to our hotel to-day. To-morrow we will go home to Fort Leslie. You shall be our guests while Bertram makes his plans. We will take care of you during the time of his absence, if he likes. Sir James loves children, and he has a great fancy for you, Nell."

"Why?"

"Because he knows a member of his family was once cruelly faithless to you."

Nell sighed.

"That seems a century ago."

"Does it? Well, will you come? It is, really, the only course in the world I can advise; and, Nell, believe me, I speak for your good."

"What will he think?"

"Bertram? He will look on it as a natural arrangement. Nell, if you come with us now it shall not pledge you to anything in the future. If you prefer to go among strangers I will find you a suitable position."

Nell shook her head.

"You are very good; but when I leave Maude and Violet I shall not need to teach any more. I had a legacy left me not long ago."

Colonel Lindsay could not be angry with his cousin and her husband for storming his castle, but he looked very grave when he heard their plan.

"Take my little girls away?"

"It is only a fortnight sooner than you would be obliged to part from them. It is not suitable for them to remain here the next few days. Miss Adair, too, would find it very trying. I think you must have overworked her; she is looking very thin and delicate."

Colonel Lindsay bit his lip.

"She is singularly sweet-tempered," went on Sir James. "If you decide on leaving your daughters in our care I can and will see that Miss Adair has a pleasant home with us."

Bertram had nothing to urge, nothing to object. He could not tell the Baronet he felt as if parting with Nell even worse than all the other troubles that assailed him; he could not even breathe into her ear thanks for the sympathy and kindness which had sustained him all this terrible time; he could not let her know how he blessed her.

CHAPTER III.

Nothing can describe the desolate feeling with which Colonel Lindsay returned to the library when he had watched the carriage out of sight. He loved his children dearly, but it was not the absence of the twins which made him heartsick and lonely; it was the loss of the blue-eyed girl, who all these weeks had been stealing into his heart, until now at last he loved her better than he had ever loved his high-born bride, the Lady Mary Carisbrook.

Nell was gone!

If only he could have taken Nell with him—Nell whose blue eyes and sweet, childlike face would have made any place home to him; but Nell's company was among life's might-have-been's. She must stay in England, while he roamed beneath an Eastern sky.

He wrote to his cousin, Lady Joan, describing his plans, and asking if he should come down to Fort Leslie to take leave of his children. Lady Joan answered the letter by return of post; she should be delighted to see him. The carriage should meet him any hour he liked to name.

He went down the same day he had received the letter. He had not written, and so the carriage did not meet him, but it mattered little. Fort Leslie was only two miles from a

Kentish watering-place, and a cab simply carried Colonel Lindsay and his bag to his cousin's house.

Sir James was in London.

He heard from the imposing butler Lady Joan was out driving. Would the Colonel go to his own room?

The Colonel expressed a wish to see his children, and the urbane butler led the way to the schoolroom, leaving the father to enter unannounced.

It was between four and five on a December day; the sun had set, and outside the hall was bright with lamplights, but the schoolroom was still in the gloaming; nothing but the soft flickering glow of the fire saved it from darkness.

Bertram saw at a glance the twins were not there, but a little figure stretched on the large old-fashioned sofa stirred his heart to its very depths. He knew quite well it was his darling. He stood by the head of the sofa gazing at her as one who could not gaze enough. He had been both husband and father, yet this girl was his first love. She might never know it. They two might never meet again, and yet, for all time, he would love her.

What a child she looked asleep!—the dark lashes of her eyes contrasting so well with the waxen purity of her skin, but there was the mark of tears on her fair cheek; those dark lashes were wet.

It came home to Bertram with a bitter pang that it could never be his happiness to soothe her sorrows or share her joys. He was going to Constantinople. If they ever met again it would be as strangers.

He bent over her. How fair she looked! They were quite alone. Why should he not kiss her just once upon her sweet red lips? Why should he not have the memory of that one caress to take out with him into the black darkness of his lonely future? He bent over her. The temptation was strong, but Nell stirred uneasily. He thought she was waking, and drew back, just as she murmured, simply, "I shall never see him again."

Of whom did she speak? It was base and treacherous to stand listening there, and yet Bertram stayed motionless, as though rooted to the spot.

"In a little while he will be gone," murmured Nell's sad, wistful voice. "It won't matter then. We shall never meet again, unless it is in Heaven. It won't hurt him then that I loved him."

Her eyes drooped again. The slumber half disturbed was deepening, but Bertram rushed forward and took her hand.

"Have you no word of welcome for me?"

She roused herself from sleep. She rubbed her eyes as though to convince herself she was not mistaken, and then cried, joyfully,—

"Oh, Colonel Lindsay, is it really you?"

"Didn't you expect me?"

"Lady Joan was not sure you would be able to come."

"And you?"

She blushed crimson.

"I thought you would not go without coming just to say 'good-bye.'"

"Good-bye," he repeated, half absently. "I do not like the word, it is so sad."

She rose, and sat upright on the sofa. Colonel Lindsay placed himself beside her.

"I wonder if you have thought of me?"

"Often."

"You are sorry for me?"

"Very; it is so hard for you to lose your home, and to have to leave the children."

"If you had it in your power, Nell, to make up to me for all my troubles—if a word from you would make me happier than home, prosperity, or wealth—would you speak it?"

She looked at him in bewilderment.

"Would you, Nell?"

"I don't understand."

"It is very simple, sweetheart. I love you better than the whole world. If you will share my exile it has no longer any sting; if you will put your hand in mine, and promise

to be my wife, I can defy any assault of fortune."

"I never thought of this."

"You never guessed I loved you?"

"Never once."

"I love you as my own life! Nell, can you love me back again?"

Her blue eyes answered for her. Bertram bent and kissed her; then, as the sound of carriage wheels proclaimed the return of Lady Joan, Nell slipped from his embrace, and ran out of the room. The Colonel was alone with his happiness.

Not for long, though. Lady Joan came in, a child in either hand.

"Where is Miss Adair? I thought she was here. Have you seen her, Bertram?"

"Yes."

The tone of that "yes" betrayed his secret. Lady Joan turned to him with a smile.

"It is terribly imprudent; but yet, do you know, I am very glad."

"Joan, you are a witch!"

She smiled.

"I only wonder you left it to the eleventh hour to ask her. Now, why did you?"

"Because I was ashamed."

"Ashamed!"

"To go to her in my adversity."

Lady Joan smiled, though her eyes were wet with tears as she took his hand.

"I think, Bertram, there are some women whom poverty cannot sting, and little Nell is one of them. So that she has love, she wants nothing else."

Lady Joan was really very good to the twins. She broke the news of their engagement to her husband on his return, telling him mischievously he would have to give Nell a wedding-breakfast, and provide another governess for the twins. "Because, of course, they will stay with us."

"Perhaps their father may want them."

Joan shook her head.

"He will only have just enough to keep his wife; and if his wife were not a little domestic treasure like Nell I should despair of that. You'll let the children stay with us, won't you, James?"

And Sir James promised obediently, as he would have done whatever request she made to him. He was fond of children; and in his large establishment, with his vast wealth, it really mattered to him very little whether Maude and Violet were members of his family.

It was Colonel Lindsay who broke to Nell the fact that she must name her wedding-day very hurriedly, because in a week's time he was to sail for Constantinople; but Lady Joan urged that a longer respite could be procured now the intended exile was to be a married man, and finally Bertram obtained leave of absence until the seventh of January.

"So, after all, we shall spend our Christmas in England, Nell!" said Bertram, fondly. "Where shall we pass our festival, little one?"

They had fixed to be married on the twentieth of December. It was the Colonel's plan that Christmas and New Year's day should be spent together, and that then they would return to Fort Leslie just to say good-bye before they sailed for their far-off Eastern home.

Nell hesitated.

"You know I told you a long time ago that some one had left me a legacy?" she began, nervously.

"It had better be settled on you at once."

"It is," said Nell; "I mean it is only an annuity for my life; but there is a bit of land with it, and a house on it, Bertram. I should like to spend my honeymoon there in our own home."

"By all means," he agreed, cheerfully. "And where is your small demesne, sweetheart?"

"You won't mind?" and she nestled the least bit closer in his arms. "It is near Bournemouth."

"I shan't 'mind' anything if it makes you happy."

Dr. Ward came to the wedding and gave away the bride. Then, when Nell was saying good-bye, and her stepchildren were clinging round her, the physician made a most extraordinary remark.

"I believe in presentiments, and I have a strong one just now that you will not go to Constantinople."

No one heeded him.

They went down to Bournemouth that winter's afternoon, Nell and her husband. She meant to tell him all, only something stopped her.

"We shall have to pass the Dell. Do you mind, Bertram?"

"I mind nothing while I have you."

But it was a pang to him when the carriage neared his own home; nay, the horses were stopping—what did it mean? A flag was flying from the tower, the old servants stood in a group upon the lawn.

"They have come to welcome you, dear," said Nell, shyly; "don't you understand?"

He shook his head.

They were on the terrace steps, when she told him very quietly. She put her hand into his.

"What does this mean, Nell?"

"That I bought the Dell," she whispered.

"Bertram, I know how you loved it. You won't mind it's coming back to you a present from your wife?"

And this happened, reader, in December, of the year of grace one thousand eight hundred and eight-three.

We imagine Colonel Lindsay did not long hold his foreign appointment, because at the present time he is residing in Hampshire with his pretty wife.

The twins, now nearly ten years old, are devoted to their stepmother, and vie with each other in worshipping a certain white-robed monarch who now reigns supreme in nurse's heart.

Bertram Ward Adair Lindsay, who must some day come into forty thousand pounds a year, and ought—lucky specimen of infancyness—to be for ever grateful to the good-natured aid his mother tendered long ago to Mrs. Higgins when she came up to London to see the Fisheries' Exhibition, which, of course, as everyone knows, resulted in NELL'S FORTUNE.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

An electrician predicts that within a generation a person can stand at the telephone and not only talk to the man at the other end, but see his face and features. The wives of commercial travellers will then be able to call up their husbands in distant towns, and see if their noses are getting red.

A THOUGHTFUL WIFE.—A friend says he has a dear, loving little wife and an excellent housekeeper. On her birthday she moved her low chair close to his side. He was reading. She placed her dear little hand lovingly on his arm, and moved it along softly toward his coat-collar. He felt nice all over. He certainly expected a kiss. "Husband!" said she. "What, my dear?" "I was just thinking—" "Were you, my love?" "I was just thinking how nicely this suit of clothes you have on would work into a rag carpet."

HE WROTE THE SENTENCE.—"Horatius," said the schoolmistress to a nine-year-old boy, with two imposing freckles on the knees of his pants, "Horatius, please form a sentence with the word toward in it, and write the sentence on the board." Horatius went to the board, and, after much scratching of head and friction of brain, printed with the crayon, in letters that looked like a lot of half-feathered Shanghai chickens running after a piece of dough, the following sentence: "I toward my trousers."

WHAT is that which, though never out of sight, is always invisible? The letter i. It is always in *visible* and never out of sight.

"HAVE you confidence in me for a sovereign?" asked a fellow-journalist of Douglas Jerrold. "I have all the confidence in the world, my dear fellow, but I haven't the sovereign," was the reply.

FOR BACHELORS.—"When does a man become a seamstress?" When he hems and haws. "No." "When he threads his way." "No." "When he rips and tears." "No." "Give it up." "Never, if he can help it."

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS.—"Don't yer want to puy somedings?" "No; I've got everything I need." "Don't yer want to puy a fine razor?" "I never shave myself." "Put maybe you wants to commit suicide one of dose days."

"How are you, Smith?" asked a man of a friend, whom he had not seen for nearly a year. "How are all the girls? Are you as sweet upon Miss Jones as you used to be?" "Oh no; I left that off several months ago." "Have a quarrel?" "No. I married her last August."

HE WASN'T AFRAID.—First Husband: It's mighty late; we must be getting home. I'm afraid my wife will look me out. Second Husband: What! look you out? I'm not afraid of my wife doing that. F. H. No? S. H.: Certainly not. If she looked me out she would deprive herself of the satisfaction of giving me a blowing up, and she wouldn't do that for the world.

"How often does the ferryboat start?" asked the lady. "Every fifteen minutes, mum." "How long since the boat left here?" "Tin minutes, mum." Lady waits ten minutes, and then says, "Didn't you say the boat starts every fifteen minutes?" "I did, mum." "Well, I have waited here ten minutes since you said the boat had gone ten minutes." "Yes, mum." "Then how do you make out that it starts every fifteen minutes?" "Why, you see, mum, it starts from this side wan fifteen minutes and from the ither side the nixt."

A LADY called on a friend who had only been married a few years, and was surprised to find her in tears. "I am the most unhappy woman in existence, and it is all on account of my husband." "Why, your husband lives for you alone. He stays at home all the time; he never goes away from home; he never brings any friends of his to the house." "Yes," replied the unfortunate woman putting her handkerchief to her eyes and sobbing convulsively, "that's—what—makes—me—so miserable."

HIS WATCH.

It came to the knowledge of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, that a corporal of his body-regiment—a fine young fellow—wore a watch-chain suspended from a leaden ball merely from a wish to appear consequential.

Frederick, wishing to be convinced of the matter, accosted the corporal one day on the parade.

"Corporal," said he, "you must have been a prudent fellow to have saved a watch out of your pay."

"I flatter myself that I am, brave sir," replied the man. "the watch is of little consequence."

The king, taking out a watch set with diamonds, said,—
"My watch points at five. How much is yours?"

Shame and confusion first appeared in the corporal's face.

A length he drew out his bullet and answered, with a firm voice,—

"My watch, sir, shows me neither five nor six; but it tells me that I ought to be ready at every hour to die for your majesty!"

The king replied,—

"In order that you may daily see one of those hours at which you are to die for me, take this watch."

SMALL FOR ITS AGE.—A son of Erin went to get a glass of ale. The barmaid handed out the glass, which Pat noticed was a very small one. While the customer was drinking the girl was praising the ale, and remarked that it was seven years old. "How could?" asked Pat. "Seven years," was the reply. "Well, beaded, it's mighty small for its age."

ONE day last week, when the engines were flying along in response to an alarm of fire, a man who was running was stopped by an eager citizen in quest of information, who asked hurriedly of him "What's a-fire?" To which the other angrily replied: "What's a fire? Why, some thing in a state of combustion, you fool! Look at your dictionary!"

An engineer of a milk train stopped at every water-tank on the road. He had previously run a cattle-train, and stopped from force of habit to water the stock. The guards say that they never want to pass through such an ordeal again. Every time the train stopped the covers of the cans flew off of their own accord.

EXPECTING TOO MUCH.—Mr. Sampson is a very irascible man, and is in the habit of punishing his boys very severely. Not long ago he observed that one of his sons needed a new pair of pants. He scolded the boy for wearing out his clothes so fast. "Pa, no pants can last any time the way you hits," replied the son, reproachfully.

AN EVENING'S PLEASURE SPOILED.—"My dear," whispered a man to his wife as they seated themselves in a theatre, "I left my purse at home." "Haven't you any money at all?" "Only half-a-crown." "Won't that be enough?" "Enough!" he repeated, impatiently. "It's a five-act play."

SHE WILL JOIN HIS CHURCH.—"There is something that has preyed heavily on my mind ever since our engagement, dear," he said, "but I am almost afraid to tell you of it." "What is it, George?" the young woman, asked anxiously. "I am a somnambulist." "Oh, is that all?" she exclaimed, with a sigh of relief. "I have always been Church of England myself, but of course when we are made one I shall expect to attend your church."

AN ATTRACTIVE WINDOW.—"I hear you want a good window-dresser?" "Yes, sir," replied the draper. "Can you make a window attractive?" "Attractive! I sh'd say I could. I can dress it so a woman can't git by it 'thout looking in." "Very well, sir, you may try." In half-an-hour the pavement in front of the shop was crowded with women, all waiting to get a chance to peep in. The merchant couldn't understand it, since nothing but a solid piece of black velvet was hanging in the window. "I didn't know a simple piece of plain velvet was so attractive." "Tain't that," said the new clerk. "They ain't looking at the velvet." "What then?" "Why, don't you see, that black background surrounds a capital mirror."

HE REMEMBERED POSEY.

Mr. Brownsmith, a swell of the worst type, called on his lady-love, Miss Mollie Pryor, last week. Mollie has a little sister, who seemed very much struck with Mr. Brownsmith's personal appearance.

"Mollie," said the little miss, "Mr. Brownsmith looks jist like Posey, don't he?"

The subject of the remark seemed very much pleased by this apparent mark of approval, and was flattering himself that he was regarded as a human flower, when he noticed that Mollie seemed pained by the remark. She hustled her sister out of the room, but she returned shortly, while Mollie was looking for something up stairs, and said,—

"Mr. Brownsmith, oo whiskers make oo look jist like Posey."

"Who is Posey, little one?" asked Brownsmith, apprehensively.

"Why, Posey, he's papa's donkey."

Brownsmith shaved off his whiskers before he came again.

SOCIETY.

On the occasion of Prince George of Wales leaving the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, for Portsmouth, he presented a portrait of himself, with a piece of plate, to Mr. Broadbridge, stationmaster at Greenwich, in recognition of the courtesy received from him on all occasions of travelling on that particular line during the six months he has been pursuing his studies at the college.

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES visited several of the studios on the Sunday previous to R.A. Sunday. Sir Frederick Leighton's and Mr. Val Prinsep's were among the number; the Royal party passed through the gardens belonging to these artists from one to the other.

THE PRINCESS CHRISTIAN has been again assisting a good cause by giving her services at a concert which took place on the 15th ult. at St. Mark's School, Windsor, for the benefit of the National Aid Society, the branch of which in the Royal borough and its neighbourhood her Royal Highness is the patron. The Princess played two duets on two pianofortes with Mr. Walter Parratt, of St. George's Chapel, the first being by Rheinberger, while the second was Saint Saens' "Danse Macabre." Over £800 has already been collected in aid of the fund. Amongst the subscribers is Her Majesty, who has given £50 in stationery and other materials.

MISS MULVANT, B.A., and Miss Taylor, B.A., who performed the duty of robing the Princess of Wales when she received her degree in music, each received from the hands of her Royal Highness an enamelled brooch, with sprays of shamrocks in emeralds and brilliants. These mementoes were heart-shaped and studded with pearls.

Lord DURHAM has been for some time residing at Lambton Castle, where he has the companionship of several of his brothers and sisters.

MISS MILLICENT GRISSELL, on the occasion of her marriage with Lieut.-Col. Pierce Taylor recently, was attired in white brocaded velvet train over a skirt of Brussels lace, trimmed with sprays of orange blossom, and tulle veil fastened with diamond stars. She was attended by six bridesmaids, who wore yellow satin merveilleux frocks under white lace, yellow sashes, and caps *en suite*; they carried bouquets of Lent lilies, and wore gold bangle bracelets, gifts of the bridegroom. A feature of the wedding was the presence, in the full dress of the Royal Horse Artillery, of the staff sergeants and sergeants of the bridegroom's battery.

The application for the Princess Beatrice's annuity is, it is said, to be made before Whitsuntide, in order that arrangements may be completed for the coming marriage.

NEGOTIATIONS are in progress between the King of Saxony and the British Government for the purchase by the latter of the gem of the Dresden Gallery, the Madonna del Sisto, by Raphael. The sum asked is £150,000. According to Vasari this was executed for the principal altar of St. Sixtus at Piacenza, about 1507-8, and was only removed to Dresden in the last century. This picture is one of the most wonderful creations of Raphael's genius. The Virgin is represented in a brilliant company of cherubims standing in the clouds, with the Holy Child in her arms. St. Sixtus and other saints kneel at the sides; a curtain drawn back encloses the picture. On each side underneath is a light parapet, on which lean two beautiful angels.

At the festival of the village choirs on the Eaton Estate, the Duchess of Westminster wore a costume of embroidered velvet, with black bonnet trimmed with jet. Lady Harlech was in black, with a grey bonnet and catfish. The affair was in every way a great success.

STATISTICS.

STRENGTH OF THE BRITISH ARMY.—A Blue Book has recently been issued, containing statistics respecting the strength and condition of the British Army during 1884. From the tables given it appears that the effective strength of the regular army was 181,227 on January 1 last year, and 188,216 on December 1, making the average strength for the year 183,014. The Army Reserve numbered 39,286 in Class I., and 7,739 in Class II., on January 1 of the present year. The strength of the Militia and Yeomanry on the dates of inspection in 1884 was 113,737 and 11,488 respectively; whilst the Volunteer force on November 1, 1884, stood at 215,015. Of the regular army, the average strength of the force at home during 1884 was 89,994, the number abroad 93,010. The proportion of the several branches of the service was as follows: Cavalry, 16,908; Royal Artillery, 31,727; Royal Engineers, 5,573; Infantry, &c., 128,796. The army in Egypt on January 1, 1885, was 15,269 strong; in the colonies (including drafts on passage out), 26,013; and in the East Indies (including drafts on passage out), 57,928; the general total at home and abroad on that date being 188,657. The total effective strength on January 1, 1875, was 186,432; and on January 1, 1865, 213,963. A similar comparison of the strength of the Volunteers gives the following result: 1884, 208,365 efficient out of a total enrolment of 215,015; 1874, 161,100 out of 175,387; and 1864, 123,707 out of 170,544.

GEMS.

RUN no risk when your soul is at stake.

SELF-PRESERVATION is the first law of nature, but too many in this world act as if it were the only one.

THE more able a man is, if he makes ill use of his abilities, the more dangerous will he be to the commonwealth.

IDLENESS can not even find time to be idle, or the industrious to be at leisure. We must be always doing or suffering.

TO be grateful for benefits received is the duty of honest men—one of the sins that most offendeth God is ingratitude.

THE very reason why men's talk, as a general thing, is nobler than women's, is because they have nobler things to talk about.

WHO wants eternal sunshine or shadow? Who would fix for ever the loveliest cloudwork of an autumn sunset, or hang over him an everlasting moonlight?

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

VEAL CROQUETTES.—Take one-half pound of cooked veal, mince it very fine, and season with salt, pepper, onions, and garlic; mix with it two eggs, well beaten, and one half-pint of cream; two sweetbreads, if you have them. Make them into small forms, and bake, or fry them in boiling lard. Mix the eggs with the croquettes; roll them in egg and in cracker-dust, and then fry them. Be careful to take them up free of grease.

FRIED CHICKEN.—Joint the chickens, and lay them in salt and water for half-an-hour; drain them, and wipe them perfectly dry with a coarse towel; sprinkle them with pepper and salt and a little flour; put them in boiling lard until they are of a light brown, being careful to turn them. Take them out and put upon a dish; cover it and set near the fire; pour into the skillet a little water and a cup of cream, stirring it briskly; garnish the chickens with parsley, and pour upon the gravy. Mash out into thin slices and fried is an improvement, if added to the dish when served.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Too much work to do! The highest pleasure and greatest satisfaction are found in work only; and the more work a man has to do, if it is work to which he is adapted, the better he likes it. The men to pity are those who can get nothing to do and those whose only business is to hunt for pleasure for itself—the men who have no other occupation than that of killing time.

THE SELECTION OF EMPLOYMENT.—One of the practical subjects of life, upon which a more scientific habit of thought is destined to throw great light, is the selection of employment with reference to the special fitness of the individual. At present the selection is generally made from a confused mixture of circumstances, chances, ambitions and whims. Some people drift into their occupations with the current of events that happens to flow in that direction at that particular time; some eagerly grasp what they think a lucky chance; some follow the dictates of parental ambition; some choose what promises an easy time, or speedy gains. This ought not so to be. People should consider what it is they are capable of doing best.

THE EARLIEST PARCHMENT.—In the early Middle Ages a man would take a simple rough sheepskin and with his own hands convert it into a missal, illuminated and "noted" for music. "Graduale unum promann formavit, purgavit, punxit, sulcavit, pria scripsit, illuminavit, musicque notavit syllabatum." Among other interesting particulars brought before the reader, we learn that the process of the Inquisition against the Knights Templar was engrossed on a roll more than seventy feet long—a charge inevitably as fatal, though by no means as brief, as that brought by the Spartan judges against the poor Platons after the fearful two years' siege. With the introduction of parchment begins the systematic history of miniature. The use of linen paper, however, is spoken of as early as 1125, the most ancient fragment extant being that on which the Sire de Joinville wrote a letter to King Louis X. in 1315. Pens, pencils, inks—in short, everything belonging to the art of the scribe and the miniaturist—are minutely treated of and particulars given, from reliable sources, of the cost which the decoration of an illuminated book would reach when such books were executed for wealthy patrons.

COST OF CHRISTENING EUGENIE'S BABY.—The secret papers of the Second Empire give an account of the expenditure on the occasion of the birth and baptism of the Prince Imperial. Medals in diamonds head the list, at a cost of 25,000 francs. Doctors and midwives received 68,000 francs. The wardrobe cost 100,000 francs. The several societies of dramatic authors and composers, men of letters, dramatic artists, musicians, painters and sculptors, industrial inventors and medical men of the Department of the Seine received 10,000 francs each. Ninety-three thousand francs were given to the benevolent "bureaux" of the Department of the Seine and of the communes in which lay the estates of the Crown. The "agents of the interior service" of the Empress received gratifications equal to four months' wages, amounting to 11,000 francs. Forty-four thousand francs were allotted to giving gratis performances at the theatres on March 18th, 1856. The parents of children born on the 16th of that month shared among them 50,000 francs. For medals to be given to authors and composers of verses and cantatas addressed to their majesties, and to the pupils at the Lycées, 85,000 francs were allowed. The relatives of the godchildren of their majesties received 20,000 francs. The service of the stables for the baptismal cortege is set down at 175,000 francs, and 160,000 francs were distributed in gratifications to the hired servants of their majesties' household. The total comes to the sum of 809,600 francs, or £13,920.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- MARION.**—The 14th of July, 1855, came on a Tuesday.
- INQUIRITIVE NELL.**—Liverpool is a seaport.
- MASHER.**—There is a so-called "flirtation." We will give the reference in a future number.
- F. H. H.**—Its value is exactly twenty shillings, one such worn, when it would be a few pence less.
- S. H. A.**—The host or hostess should be the first to speak a few words of welcome to the guest.
- MOONLIGHT.**—Take no notice of him. A man who will deliberately make love to two girls at the same time is not worth a second thought.
- E. H.**—We cannot give tradesmen's addresses. A little inquiry in your neighbourhood would soon solve your difficulty.
- X. F. R.**—A ready way of imitating ground glass is to dissolve Epsom salts in beer and apply with a brush. The mixture crystallises upon drying.
- C. C. P.**—For polishing black marble use oxide of tin. It does not stain; woollen cloth or felt (an old felt hat) for the rubber.
- TINY MAY.**—1. We have given the receipt repeatedly lately. 2. Quite tall enough. 3. It will tend to do so. 4. Yes; plenty of good nourishing food. 5. May is probably a softening of Mary, which means "bitter."
- AMY DARELL.**—1. We cannot inform you. 2. Not at all. Faithfulness depends upon firmness of disposition. A man may be easily both firm and emotional. 3. Hair-light brown.
- COUNTRY GIRL.**—1. Lizzie means the "oath of the lord;" Ellen, "fruitful." 2. Temperance, regular hours, and an occasional dose of magnesia or bicarbonate of soda.
- ANNIE C.**—1. A little stimulating lotion of sweet oil and cantharides (any chemist will tell you the proportions) might be effectual. 2. Glycerine applied thoroughly every night on retiring to rest.
- ALICE A.**—Ivory is bleached by exposing to sunlight. It takes in this way from one month to six months. Exposed to sunlight under a light cover of turpentine, the bleaching may be done in three or four days.
- H. M. R.**—If you desire to become a mechanical draughtsman it will be best for you to attach yourself to some engineer's office. Or if you desire to follow art, then you should study in the studio of some artist.
- F. B. X.**—You acted in a proper manner in resenting the liberty taken by your escort in kissing you. He should apologise for his rude action before expecting you to look upon him with any degree of friendship.
- LETTIE J.**—You are too young to think of love or to indulge in such nonsense as exchanging photographs with any of the opposite sex. We would advise you to be guided by the counsels of your mother—the best friend you will ever meet with in this world.
- GLADYS and SIBYL.**—1. We decline to give any receipt to make faces pale and thin, as anything which would effect that object could only be injurious. 2. Sweetstuff is better left alone by grown-up people. 3. See answers in recent numbers.
- GRACE SUTTBRELL.**—Excise in the shape of callisthenics will improve the figure. To whiten the hands dip them in water as little as possible, keep them covered whenever practicable, and use oatmeal in the water in which you wash.
- K. M.**—No sure or safe remedy other than the tweezers can be recommended for the removal of hair from the human body, as all the compounds intended for the purpose act injuriously upon the skin, and in many cases have been known to poison the system.
- E. F. R.**—There are two different breeds of St. Bernard dogs—the long-haired and short-haired. Pure-bred specimens of either variety are comparatively rare. They are very gentle and intelligent, being easily taught to obey the slightest commands of their master.
- A. C. C.**—We urge you to follow the advice of your mother and learn dressmaking. Your faculty of drawing will help you in designing new costumes. It is a very fine art, the art of making well-fitting clothing for women.
- C. J. H.**—The manner in which your brother acts is very ungentlemanly, and it would do no harm to acquaint him with the fact. Do not allow it to worry you, but treat his taunts in a ladylike manner at all times and places.
- X. F.**—The maiden name of the writer known in the literary world as George Eliot was Marian C. Evans. She was born at Griff, in the north of England, Nov. 22, 1820. The date of her death was Dec. 22, 1880. Amongst the greatest of her novels may be mentioned *Romola*, *Adam Bede*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*.
- M. N. S.**—A Swiss peasant costume, suitable for a masquerade or fancy dress ball, consists of a scarlet satin petticoat, black silk stockings, scarlet satin slippers; black velvet waist, with round, half-low neck edged with silver-dotted lace and drawn close about the neck, finished with a silver ruching, the bodice closed with silver buttons; silver bangles on the arms; and a high black hat ornamented with silver spears. The

Italian peasant dress is a black skirt trimmed with alternate red and yellow stripes, a black velvet waist, and a white muslin head-dress and apron. These costumes may be worn at a skating carnival, as you suggest, and if prettily made will be sure to attract attention and win praise, if not the offered prize.

ELFIE.—1. "Has" is part of the verb to have; as is a conjunction. The sense is, therefore, quite different. 2. To clean straw properly is a process requiring considerable skill, and, therefore, would not pay to be undertaken by a private individual. Besides, it can be done so cheaply by ordinary dyers, that it is not worth the trouble.

H. F. C.—The engagement ring is generally worn on the third finger of the same hand, and replaced by the wedding-ring, to which it may also serve as a guard. Some persons wear this ring on the third, or right finger of the right hand.

S. J. F.—A dove or slate-coloured dye may be made by boiling a tea-cupful of black tea in an iron pot, adding a teaspoonful of copperas. The depth of the colour will depend on the quantity of water used. Dye the articles in this, hang up to drain, and finally rinse out in soap-suds.

EMMA H.—Leather is usually bleached with an acetate of lead and sulphuric acid. Those who bleach leather in this way say its strength is not injured by this treatment, but we should say it was, though possibly in only a slight degree, according to the manner of treatment.

M. G. F.—Your position is a very delicate one. You should endeavour to return the affection which you have won by such a long courtship. If you are engaged you should keep your promise of marriage at any cost to yourself. If you are not engaged, you may be able to retreat with honour.

DOWN THE STREAM.

Adown the stream, in dream-like ease,
Our shallop floats with motion slight,
Beneath the low-boughed summer trees,
Whose branches break the fervent light.

The languid fishes to our bait
Scarce rise as we drift slow along,
While from the shore sounds out elate
The shrill cicada's noonday song.

A timid breeze steals from the reed,
To die in ripples on the wave,
Lost in the swaying imagery
Of river reeds full-plumed and brave.

Around, above, a holy trance,
As though Dame Nature slept a space,
And trees and skies leaned down askance,
To view their drowsy mistress's face.

I put my fingers on my lips,
And whisper to my silent friends:
"We will float on till life-tide slips
Into the sky, where ocean ends."

M. C. B.

J. C. H.—1. It would be much cheaper, and afford greater satisfaction, to buy the paint and varnish needed in the renovation of your kitchen than to attempt to mix it yourself. 2. Very neat writing, but the spelling is not quite up to the average.

B. W. E.—1. One is a dark-brown lock, while the other is of a decidedly blonde type. Both are so pretty that it would be impossible to express a preference. 2. No; the eyes would lead one to believe they were possessed by an exceptionally bright and witty lady. Fine form and captivating expression. 3. Passable penmanship, that may be improved by practice.

S. L. G.—1. Webster defines ground to be "the surface of a floor;" &c., and hence its use by English authors, instead of floor, cannot be said to be improper. American writers prefer the latter word, as referring to the heroine of a story, "She fell to the floor" (not ground). 2. The matter is undergoing legal investigation.

D. P. H. G.—1. For blotches of the kind described, apply glycerine at night and wash off in the morning with a solution of borax and water. Make the solution tolerably strong. 2. Prepared chalk makes an excellent dentifrice. To make it fragrant, mix with it a little powderedorris root. 3. No premium. 4. In Germany, the *Kaiser* and *Deutschland* (sister ships); in France, the *Republique*; in England, the *Inferable*; in the United States, the *Wabash* (not iron-clad). 5. The U.S. army consists of about 20,000 effective men.

ANXIOUS ELLEN.—When pure butter is examined under the microscope, the whole field is filled with extremely fine globules, which are entirely destitute of any approach to crystalline form. If the butter is artificial, or a mixture of both, the field presents numerous angular or acicular particles between the globules. For the chemical examination try the following: The butter to be examined (if in the form of butter) must be first melted and rendered pretty free from water and salt, by filtration if necessary; ten grains are then to be put into a test tube, and liquefied by placing the tube in hot water at about 150 degrees Fahrenheit; remove the tube when ready, and add 30 minims of carbonic acid (Calvert's No. 2 acid, in crystals, one pound; distilled water, two fluid ounces). Shake the mixture, and again place it in the water

bath until it is transparent. Set the tube aside for a time. If the sample thus treated be pure butter a perfect solution will be the result; if bad, mutton, or pork fat, the mixture will resolve itself into two solutions of different densities, with a clear line of demarcation; the denser of the two solutions, if beef fat, will occupy about 49.7, lard 49.6, mutton 44 per cent of the entire volume; when sufficiently cooled, more or less deposit will be observed in the uppermost solution.

ERIC.—The white bodies to which you refer are simply accumulations of sebaceous matter in the hair follicles of the skin. They are often spoken of as "worms," but not correctly, for they have no organic constitution whatever, and they are of no importance except as they cause pain and annoyance. They are exceedingly common between the ages of fourteen and twenty to twenty-two, generally disappearing after that limit. No medicines or appliances are known which really produce any decided effect upon them, except that if the digestion is imperfect, remedies which will improve it will be of service.

D. M. H.—Telegraph instruments are polished and lacquered. You cannot clean the parts with acid to any advantage. The best way is to take the instrument apart and clean off old lacquer with alcohol, then polish all the parts with rottenstone and oil on leather, string, or anything that will reach the various parts. Then thoroughly clean with a cloth wet with alcohol, and lacquer with thin shellac varnish, using a flat camel's hair brush. Remove Japan by burning off, or dissolving the varnish in naphtha. We do not know of any metal that will expand and contract as you desire under the influence of an electric current.

R. V. A.—An eminent balloonist, Mr. Coxwell, and the noted meteorologist, Mr. Glaisher, attained the greatest height a balloon has ever reached on September 5, 1852. The last observation taken by them showed an altitude of 29,000 feet. Mr. Glaisher, who took this observation, then became insensible, and remained in that condition for six or seven minutes, during which time the balloon continued to ascend until it was checked by Mr. Coxwell, who seized the valve-rope with his teeth—his hands being helpless—and thus checked further ascension. It is estimated that they must have reached the astonishing height of seven miles.

J. E. M.—You can make an excellent jet black ink for sale, if you wish it, by following this recipe: Get three pounds of Aleppo nut galls, bruised; green copperas, bruised, one pound; gum arabic, half-a-pound; rasped logwood, one pound; rain water, five gallons. You can get all these ingredients at any drug-gist's. Boil the whole down to four gallons, and when cold, stir it well for five minutes; then strain through a flannel bag into an earthen pan; add two ounces of cloths, slightly bruised, to prevent it from becoming mouldy. The following day, put up into the bottles and cork. A pretty label for the front of the bottle will add greatly to its ready sale.

N. V. R.—1. Wishes to know if we think he is "suited for the jewellery trade." How is it possible for us to tell him this? This is a fair sample of many of the communications we receive, in which the writers appear to think we can tell them, without any previous acquaintance with their tastes or abilities, what trade they are best suited for; whether they should go to Japan or China, or some other foreign country; and questions of a similar sort. On such personal subjects, it is always best to obtain advice from those who can give it, based on intimate acquaintance and knowledge of the tastes, habits and qualifications of the parties inquiring. 2. With a little practice, your penmanship may be brought up to a very high standard.

G. H. R.—1. Impression-paper, used to transfer figures in embroidery, or impressions of leaves, is made by mixing Prussian blue, lampblack, Venetian red or chromo green, with sufficient lard or sweet oil to make a paste of the consistency of cream. The colouring matter should be rubbed with a palette-knife on a plate or stone until it becomes perfectly smooth. Use rather thin, but firm, white paper, put on with a sponge, and wipe as dry as possible. Then lay the prepared sheets between white paper and press by laying books or other weights upon them until the surplus oil is absorbed, when they will be ready for use. 2. How will this acrostic suit you?

"Hearts winning by her quiet charms,
Exact little, seeking naught,
Love comes to her unbid, unought,
Entreating that he may be caught,
Nor leave the prison of her arms."

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